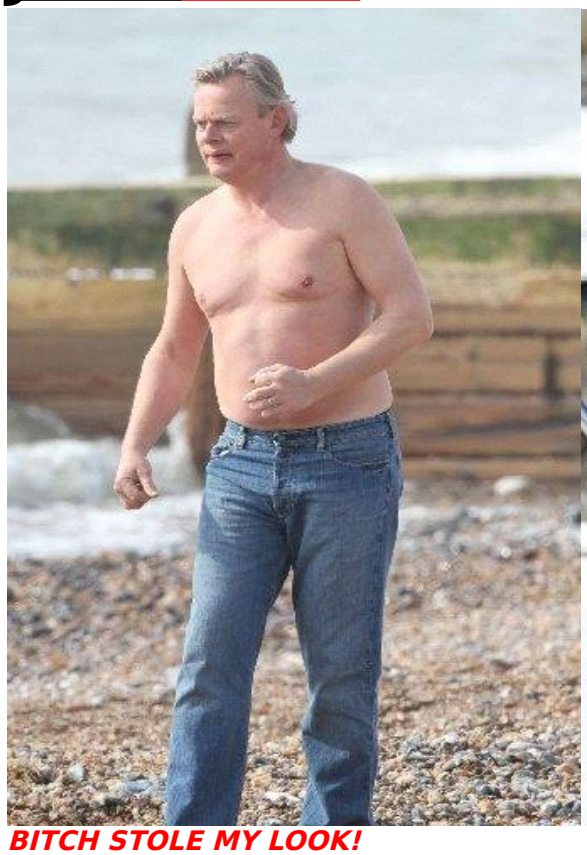
MOdA *HUMOR*
JULY *2024*



BITCH STOLE MY LOOK!
Hunky Martin Clunes vs grotesque Elon Musk. Both are in their 50's but I believe that
the former *Doc Martin*, here working on the reboot of *The Rise And Fall of Reginald Perrin*,
does justice to chest-baring daddydom.

“BILL.”
THE STORY OF A BOY WHOM THE GODS LOVED
The Project Gutenberg eBook of
***In a Canadian Canoe*, by Barry Pain**

Bill came slowly up the steps from a basement flat in Pond Buildings, crossed the pavement, and sat down on the kerb-stone in the sunshine, with his feet in a delightful puddle. He was reflecting.

“All that fuss about a dead byeby!” he said to himself.

He was quite a little boy, with a dirty face, gipsy eyes, and a love for animals. He had slept the deep sleep of childhood the night before,

and had heard nothing of what was happening. In the early morning, however, he had been enlightened by his father--a weak man, with a shuffling gait, who tried to do right and generally failed.

“Bill, cummere. Larst night there were a byeby come to be your sister if she’d grow’d. But she didn’t live more’n hour. An’ that’s why your awnt’s ’ere, an’ mind yer do whort she tells yer, an’ don’t go inter the other room, an’ don’t do nothin’ ’cep’ whort yer told, or I’ll break yer ’ead for yer, sure’s death, I will!”

Then Bill’s father had gone away to his work, being unable to afford the loss of a day; and Bill’s vehement, red-haired aunt had come into the kitchen, and shaken him, and abused him, and given him some breakfast. Bill’s aunt was one of those unfortunate people who cannot love one person without hating three others to make up for it. Just at present she was loving Bill’s mother, her sister, very much, and retained her self-respect by being very strict with Bill’s father, with Bill himself, and with the doctor. She instructed Bill that he was not to go to school that morning. He was to remain absolutely quiet in the kitchen, because he might be wanted to run errands and do odd jobs. For some time Bill had obeyed her, and then monotony tempted him to include the little yard at the back in his definition of the kitchen. All the basement flats in Pond Buildings have little yards at the back. Most of the inhabitants use them as drying-grounds. In some of them there is a dead shrub or the remains of a sanguine geranium that failed; in all of them there are cinders and very old meat-tins. Now, when Bill went out into the yard, he found the black cat, which he called Simon Peter, asleep in the sun on the wall. Simon Peter did not belong to any one; she roamed about at the back of Pond Buildings, dodged anything that was thrown at her, and ate unspeakable things. She had formed a melancholy and unremunerative attachment to Bill; her name had been suggested to him by stray visits to a Sunday-school, forced on him during a short season when his father, to use his own phrase, had got religion. “Siming Peter,” said Bill, as he scratched her gently under the ear, “Siming Peter, my cat, come in ’ere along o’ me and ’ave some milk.”

It is not at all probable that Simon Peter was deceived by this. She must have known that, with the best intentions in the world, Bill could not do so much as this for her. Yet she blinked at him with her lazy green eyes, and followed him from the yard into the kitchen. Bill filled a saucer with water, and put it down on the ground before her. “There yer are, Siming Peter,” he said; “an’ that’s better for yer nor any milk.” Simon Peter put up her back slowly, mewed contemptuously, and trotted out into the yard again. Bill, dashing after her, trod on the saucer and broke it, and overturned a chair. In another moment he was in the clutches of his fierce aunt.

“Do you want to kill your blessed mother, you devil? Didn’t I tell yer to sit quoite? An’ a good saucer broke, with the poor dead corpse of your byeby sister lyin’ in the next room. Go hout! You’re more nuisance nor you’re wuth. See ’ere. Don’t you show your ugly ’ead ’ere agin afore night. An’ when yer comes back I’ll tell your father of yer, an’ ’e ’ll skin yer alive. Dinner? Not for such as you. Hout yer git.”

So Bill had been turned out, and now sat with his feet in a delightful puddle, reflecting for a minute or two on dead babies, injustice, puddles, and other things. It was a larger puddle, as far as Bill could see, than any other in the street, and it was this which made it so charming. But a puddle is of no use to any one who has not got something to float on it. If you have something to float on it you can imagine boats, and races, and storms, and it becomes a magnificent playground for the imagination; otherwise the biggest puddle is simply a puddle, and it is nothing more. So Bill started down the street to look for something which would float, a scrap of paper or a straw. He was stopped by a lanky unkempt girl with yellow hair, who was leaning on a broom that was almost bald, outside an open door. She was four or five years older than Bill, and she was very fond of him. The girls of the wretched neighbourhood for the most part rather petted Bill; they did so, without knowing their reason, because he was quaint, and pretty, and little. He was rather dirty it was true, but then so were they; and for the most part they were not so pretty.

“Bill,” said the yellow-haired girl, “why awnt yer at school? You’ll ketch it, Bill.”

“No, I ’ont. They kep’ me, ’cos we’ve got a byeby, an’ the byeby’s dead. Then they tunned me out for breakin’ a saucer when I was goin’ after Siming Peter what I were feedin’, an’ I ain’t to ’ave no dinner, and I ain’t to come back afore night, and when I do come back I’m goin’ to be walloped. I wish I was dead!”

“Oh, Bill, you _are_ a bad boy; what are yer goin’ to do?”

“Play ships at that puddle. I was lookin’ for sutthin’ what ’ud do for ships, an’ can’t find nothin’.”

“An’ what’ll yer do about dinner?”

“I ain’t goin’ to ’ave no dinner,” said Bill, solemnly, “I’m goin’ to starve. They don’t keer. Dead byebies is what _they_ like.”

The lanky girl leaned her broom against the wall, sat down on the doorstep, and commenced the research of a pocket; the pocket yielded her one penny.

“Look ’ere, Bill,” she said, “you take this and git yourself sutthin’ to eat.”

Bill shook his head, and pressed his lips together. He was much moved.

“I ’ad it give me a week ago, and I sived it ’cos there warn’t nothin’ what I wanted. So you take it. I don’t want it. If yer like, yer can give us a kiss for it.” She pressed it into his hand. “There ain’t no other little boy I know what I’d give it to,” she added rather inconsistently.

Bill nodded his head, and the lips grew a little tremulous. He had been treated cruelly all the morning, and this sudden change to sympathy and generosity was almost too much for him. He kissed the yellow-haired

girl--once timidly and then suddenly with great affection.

“Why, Bill,” she said, “I ain’t done nothin’ to ’urt yer, yer look ommust as if yer was goin’ to cry.”

“No, I ain’t,” replied Bill, finding words with difficulty, “but--but I ’ate ev’rybody in the world ’cep’ you.”

Then he walked away with great dignity, and every nerve in his excitable little body quivering. He felt on the whole rather more wretched than before. The contrast made him feel both sides of it more deeply. He had forgotten now about the beautiful puddle and his intention to play ships. He wandered down the main street, and then down a side street which led behind a grim, frowning church. And here he found something which attracted his attention. It was a dirty little shop which a small tobacconist and an almost microscopical grocer had used successively as a last step before bankruptcy. It had then remained for some time unoccupied. But now the whole of the window was occupied with one great bright picture, before which a small crowd had gathered. It represented a beautiful mermaid swimming in a beautiful sea, accompanied by a small octopus and some boiled shrimps. Her hair was very golden and very long; her eyes were very blue; she was very pink and very fat. Underneath was the announcement--

THE MERMAID OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC!

Positively to be Seen Within!!

FOR A FEW DAYS ONLY.

ADMISSION ONE PENNY

An old man was standing in the doorway, with a tattered red curtain behind him, supplying further details of the history and personal appearance of the mermaid. He looked slightly military, distinctly intemperate, and very unfortunate, yet he was energetic.

“What it comes to is this--for a few days only I am offering two ’igh-class entertainments at the price of one. The performance commences with an exhibition by that most marvellous Spanish conjurer, Madumarsell Rimbini, and concludes with that unparalleled wonder of the world, the mermaid of the Western Pasuffolk. I have been asked frequent if it pays me to do this. No, it does _not_ pay me. I am doing it entirely as an advertisement. Kindly take notice that this mermaid is not a shadder, faked up with lookin’ glasses. She is real--solid--genuine--discovered by an English officer while cruisin’ in the Western Pasuffolk, and purchased direct from ’im by myself. The performance will commence in one minute. If any gentleman is not able to stay now, I may remark that the performances will be repeated agin this evenin’ from seven to ten. What it comes to is this--for a few days only, etc.”

Of course Bill had seen shows of a kind before. He had seen a ’bus horse stumble, and almost pick itself up, and stumble again, and finally go down half on the kerb-stone. That had been attractive, but

there had been nothing to pay for it. Again, in his Sunday-school days, he had been present at an entertainment where the exhilaration of solid buns and dissolving views had been gently tempered by a short address. That too was attractive, but it had been free. And now it would not be possible to see this beautiful buoyant creature swimming in clear shrimp-haunted waters unless he paid a penny for it, the only penny that he possessed. Never before had he paid anything to go anywhere. The temptation was masterful. It gripped him, and drew him towards the tattered red curtain that hung over the entrance. In another minute he had paid his penny, and stood within.

At one end of the shop a low stage had been erected. On the stage was something which looked like a large packing-case with a piece of red baize thrown over it. There was a small table, on which were two packs of playing-cards and a brightly coloured pill-box, and a tired fat woman in a low dress of peculiar frowziness. As the audience entered she put a smile on her face, where it remained fixed as if it had been pinned. The performance commenced with three clumsy card-tricks. Then she requested some one in the audience to put a halfpenny in the painted pill-box and see it changed into a shilling. The audience felt that they had been weak in paying a penny to see the show, and on this last point they were adamant. They would put no halfpennies in no pill-boxes. They were now firm. So also was the Spanish conjurer, and this trick was omitted. She intimated that she would now proceed to the second part of the entertainment, the exhibition of the mermaid of the Western Pacific. She removed, dramatically, the red-baize cover, disclosing a glass case. The audience pressed forward to examine its contents. The case was filled for the most part with those romantic rocks and grasses which conventionality has appointed to be a suitable setting for stuffed canaries, or stuffed dogs, or anything that is stuffed. There was a background of painted sky and sea; and in the front there was a small, most horrible figure, looking straight at Bill out of hideous, green, glassy eyes. It was not the lovely creature depicted in the window outside. It was a monstrous thing, a contemptible fraud to the practised intelligence, but to Bill's childish, excitable mind a thing of unspeakable horror and fascination. The lower half was a wilted, withered fish; then came a girdle of seaweed, and then something which was near to being human, yellow and waxy, with a ghastly face, a bald head, and those eyes that would keep looking at Bill. He shut his own eyes for a second; when he opened them again the monstrous thing was still looking at him.

There were two men standing near to Bill. One of them was a very young and very satirical carpenter, with a foot-rule sticking out of his coat-pocket. "So that's a mermaid!" he remarked. "Yer call that a mermaid--oh!--indeed, a mermaid--oh, yes!"

"Seems to me," said the other man, middle-aged, cadaverous, and dressed in rusty black, "that it's a sight more like a dead byeby."

"Well, you _ought_ to know," replied the satirical carpenter, grinning.

Bill heard this. So in that basement flat in Pond Buildings, Bill's home, there was something lying quite still and waiting for him, to frighten him. He had never thought what a dead baby would be like. His

mind began to work in flashes. The first flash reminded him of some horrible stories which his red-haired, vehement aunt had told him, to terrify him into being good. He had objected at the close of one story that dead people could not walk about.

“You don’t know,” his aunt had replied, “nobody knows, what dead people can do.” In the second flash he imagined that he had gone home, had been lectured by his aunt, and beaten by his father, and had cried himself to sleep. He would wake up at night, when all was quiet--he felt sure of it--and the room would not be quite dark. He would see by the white moonlight a horrible, yellow, waxy thing crawling across the floor. It would not go to the right or to the left, but straight towards him. It would be his dead baby sister, and it would have a face like the face of the mermaid, and it would stare at him. He would be unable to call out. It would come nearer and nearer, and at last it would touch him. Then he would die of fright.

No, he would not go home, not until the dead baby had been taken away.

As the audience crowded out through the narrow doorway, Bill touched the man in shabby black:

“Please, sir, ’ow long is it afore they bury dead babies?”

The man stared at him searchingly. “What do yer want to know that for? Depends on the weather partly, and on the inclinations of the bereaved party. ‘Soon as possible’ ’s allus my advice, but they let it go for days frequent.”

Bill thanked him, and walked aimlessly away. He could not get the terror out of his mind. He walked through street after street, so absorbed in horrible thoughts that he hardly noticed what direction he was taking, and only just escaped being run over. He had been wandering for over an hour when he came across two boys, whom he knew, playing marbles. This was companionship and diversion for his thoughts. For some time he watched the game with interest, and then one of the players pulled from his pocket two large marbles of greenish glass, and set them rolling. Bill turned away at once, for he had been reminded of those green eyes. He imagined that they were still looking at him; but, in his imagination, they belonged not to the mermaid, but to the dead baby. He wished again and again that he had never been to that show. He was growing almost desperate with terror. Of course, his state of mind was to some extent due to the fact that he had eaten nothing for eight hours. But then, Bill did not know this. Suddenly he gave a great start, and a gasp for breath, for he had been touched on the shoulder. He looked up and saw his father. Now Bill’s father had drunk two glasses of bad beer during his dinner hour, and in consequence he was feeling somewhat angry and somewhat self-righteous, for his head was exceedingly weak and poor. He addressed Bill very solemnly--

“Loit’rin’ in the streets! loit’rin’ and playin’ in the streets!
What’s the good o’ my bringing of yer up in the fear o’ Gawd?”

Bill had no answer to make; so his father aimed a blow at him, which Bill dodged.

“All right,” his father continued, “I’m sent out on a jorb, and I ain’t got the time to wallup yer now. But you mark my words--this very night, as sure as my name’s what it is, I’ll knock yer blawstid ’ead off.”

At any other time this would have frightened Bill. But now it came as a positive relief. There is no fear so painful, so maddening, as the fear of the supernatural. The promise that he should have his head knocked off had in itself but little charm or attraction. But in that case he knew what to fear and from whence to fear it. It took his thoughts away for a few minutes from the horror of that dead baby, whose ghastly face he pictured to himself so clearly. But it was only for a few minutes; the face came back again to his mind and haunted him. He could not escape from it. He was more than ever determined that he would not go home; he dared not spend a night in the next room to it. Already the afternoon was closing in, and Bill had no notion where he was to go for the night. For the present he decided to make his way to the green; he would probably meet other boys there that he knew.

The green to which he went is much frequented by the poor of the south-west. The railway skirts one side of it, and gives it an additional attraction to children. Bill was tired out with walking. He flung himself down on the grass to rest. His exhaustion at last overcame his fears, and he fell asleep. He slept for a long time, and in his sleep he had a dream.

It was, so it seemed to him in his dream, late in the evening, and he was standing outside the door of the basement flat. He had knocked, and was waiting to be admitted. Suddenly he noticed that the door was just ajar. He pushed it open and entered. He called, but there was no answer. All was dark. The outer door swung to with a bang behind him. He thought that he would wait in the kitchen by the light of the fire until some one came. He felt his way to the kitchen and sat down in front of the fire.

It had burnt very low, and the furniture was only just distinguishable by the light of it. As he was waiting he heard very faintly the sound of breathing. It did not frighten him; but he could not understand it, because as far as he could see there was no living thing in the room except himself. He thought that he would strike a light and discover what it was. The matches were in a cupboard on the right-hand side of the fireplace. He could only just reach the fastening, and it took him some little time to undo it. The moment the fastening was undone the door flew open, and something yellowish-white fell or rather leapt out upon him, fixing little quickly-moving fingers in his hair. With a scream he fell to the floor. He had shut his eyes in horror, but he felt compelled to open them again to see what this thing was that clung to him, writhing and panting. A little spurt of flame had shot up, and showed him the face. Its eyes were blinking and rolling. Its mouth moved horribly and convulsively, and there was foam on the white lips. The face was close to his own; it drew nearer; it touched him. It was wet.

Bill suddenly woke and sprang to his feet, shivering and maddened with terror. The green was dark and deserted. A cold, strong wind

had sprung up, and he heard it howling dismally. An impulse seized him to run--to run for his life. For a moment he hesitated; and then, under the shadow of the wall, slinking along in the darkness, he saw something white coming towards him, and with a quick gasp he turned and ran. He paid no heed to the direction in which he was going; he dared not look behind, for he felt sure that the nameless horror was behind him; he ran until he was breathless, and then walked a few paces, and ran again. As he crossed the road on the outer edge of the green, a policeman stopped and looked at him suspiciously. Bill did not even see the policeman. His one idea was escape.

It happened that he ran in the direction of the river. He had left the road now, and was following a muddy track that led through some grimy, desolate market-gardens. All around him there was horror. It screamed in the screaming wind with a voice that was half human; it took shape in the darkness, and lean, white arms, convulsively active, seemed to be snatching at him as he passed; the pattering of blown leaves was changed by it into the pattering of something ghastly, coming very quickly after him. For one second he paused on the river's brink; and then, pressing both his hands tightly over his eyes, he flung himself into the water.

And the river went on unconcerned, and the laws of Nature did not deviate from their regular course. So the boy was drowned. It was a pity; for he was in some ways a lovable boy, and there were possibilities in him.

* * * * *

Bill's aunt was putting the untidy bedroom straight when his mother, opening her eyes and turning a little on the bed, said, in a low, tired voice--

"I want Bill. Wheer's Bill?"

"I sent 'im out, dearie; 'e'll be back d'rectly. Don't you worry yourself about Bill. Why, that drattid lamp's a-shinin' strite onto your eyes. I'll turn it down."

There was a moment's pause, while the vehement woman--quiet enough now--arranged the lamp and took her place by the bedside. She smoothed the young mother's faded hair with one hand. "Go to sleep, dearie," she said.

Then she began to sing in a hushed, quavering voice. It was a favourite hymn, and for devotional purposes she rarely used more than one vowel-sound--

"Urbud wuth me! Fust fulls thur uvvun-tud."

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Whiskaboom
By ALAN ARKIN

[Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenburg etext was produced from Galaxy Science Fiction August 1955. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

Jack's blunder was disastrous, but what he worried about was: would Einstein have approved?

Dear Mr. Gretch:

Mrs. Burroughs and I are sending your son Jack to you because we do not know what else to do with him. As you can see, we can't keep him with us in his present condition.

Also, Jack owes us two weeks rent and, since Mrs. Burroughs and I are retired, we would appreciate your sending the money. It has been a dry year and our garden has done poorly.

The only reason we put up with your son in the first place was because we are so hard-pressed.

He saw the sign on the porch, rang the bell and paid Mrs. Burroughs a month's rent without even looking at the room. Then he ran out to his car and commenced pulling out suitcases and boxes and dragging them upstairs.

After the third trip, Mrs. Burroughs saw he was having trouble with the stuff and he looked kind of worn out, so she offered to help.

He gave her a hard look, as she described it to me when I got home. He said, "I don't want anyone touching anything. Please don't interfere."

"I didn't mean to interfere," my wife told him. "I only wanted to help."

"I don't want any help," he said quietly, but with a wild look in his eye, and he staggered upstairs with the last of his baggage and locked the door.

* * * * *

When I got home, Mrs. Burroughs told me she thought I ought to take a look at the new boarder. I went up, thinking we'd have a little chat and straighten things out. I could hear him inside, hammering on something.

He didn't hear my first knock or the second. I got sore and nearly banged the door down, at which time he decided to open up.

I charged in, ready to fight a bear. And there was this skinny

red-headed son of yours glaring at me.

"That's a lot of hammering you're doing, son," I said.

"That's the only way I can get these boxes open, and don't call me son."

"I don't like to disturb you, Mr. Gretch, but Mrs. Burroughs is a little upset over the way you acted today. I think you ought to come down for a cup of tea and get acquainted."

"I know I was rude," he said, looking a little ashamed, "but I have waited for years for a chance to get to work on my own, with no interference. I'll come down tomorrow, when I have got my equipment set up, and apologize to Mrs. Burroughs then."

I asked him what he was working on, but he said he would explain later. Before I got out of the door, he was hammering again. He worked till after midnight.

We saw Jack at mealtimes for the next few days, but he didn't talk much. We learned that he was twenty-six, in spite of his looking like a boy in his teens, that he thought Prof. Einstein the greatest man ever, and that he disliked being called son. Of his experiment, he didn't have much to say then. He saw Mrs. Burroughs was a little nervous about his experimenting in the guest room and he assured her it was not dangerous.

Before the week was out, we started hearing the noises. The first one was like a wire brush going around a barrel. It went _whisk, whisk_. Then he rigged up something that went _skaboom_ every few seconds, like a loud heartbeat. Once in a while, he got in a sound like a creaky well pump, but mostly it was _skaboom_ and _whisk_, which eventually settled down to a steady rhythm, _whiskaboom, whiskaboom_.

It was kind of pleasant.

* * * * *

Neither of us saw him for two days. The noises kept going on. Mrs. Burroughs was alarmed because he did not answer her knock at mealtimes, and one morning she charged upstairs and hollered at him through the door.

"You stop your nonsense this minute and come down to breakfast!"

"I'm not hungry," he called back.

"You open this door!" she ordered and, by George, he did. "Your _whiskaboom_ or whatever it is will keep till after breakfast."

He sat at the table, but he was a tired boy. He had a cold, his eyelids kept batting, and I don't believe he could have lifted his coffee cup. He tried to look awake, and then over he went with his face in the oatmeal.

Mrs. Burroughs ran for the ammonia, but he was out cold, so we wiped the oatmeal off his face and carried him upstairs.

My wife rubbed Jack's wrists with garlic and put wet towels on his face, and presently he came to. He looked wildly about the room at his machinery. It was all there, and strange-looking stuff, too.

"Please go away," he begged. "I've got work to do."

Mrs. Burroughs helped him blow his nose. "There'll be no work for you, sonny. Not until you're well. We'll take care of you." He didn't seem to mind being called sonny.

He was sick for a week and we tended him like one of our own. We got to know him pretty well. And we also got to know you.

Now, Mr. Gretch, whatever you are doing in your laboratory is your own business. You could be making atomic disintegrators, for all Jack told us. But he does not like or approve of it and he told us about your running battle with him to keep him working on your project instead of his own.

Jack tried to explain his ideas for harnessing time and what he called "the re-integration principle." It was all so much _whiskaboom_ to us, so to speak, but he claimed it was for the good of mankind, which was fine with us.

But he said you would not let him work it out because there was less money in it than in your project, and this is why he had to get away and work and worry himself into a collapse.

When he got well, Mrs. Burroughs told him, "From now on, you're going to have three meals a day and eight hours sleep, and in between you can play on your _whiskaboom_ all you please."

The _whiskabooming_ became as familiar to us as our own voices.

Last Sunday, Mrs. Burroughs and I came home from church, about noon. She went inside through the front door to fix dinner. I walked around the house to look at the garden. And the moment I walked past the front of the house, I got the shock of my life.

The house disappeared!

* * * * *

I was too surprised to stop walking, and a step later I was standing at the back of the house, and it was all there. I took a step back and the whole house vanished again. One more step and I was at the front.

It looked like a real house in front and in back, but there wasn't any in-between. It was like one of those false-front saloons on a movie lot, but thinner.

I thought of my wife, who had gone into the kitchen and, for all I

knew, was as thin as the house, and I went charging in the back door, yelling.

"Are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right," she said. "What's the matter with you?"

I grabbed her and she was all there, thank heavens. She giggled and called me an old fool, but I dragged her outside and showed her what had happened to our house.

She saw it, too, so I knew I didn't have sunstroke, but she couldn't understand it any better than I.

Right about then, I detected a prominent absence of _whiskabooming_. "Jack!" I hollered, and we hurried back into the house and upstairs.

Well, Mr. Gretch, it was so pitiful, I can't describe it. He was there, but I never saw a more miserable human being. He was not only thin but also flat, like a cartoon of a man who had been steamrollered. He was lying on the bed, holding onto the covers, with no more substance to him than a thin piece of paper. Less.

Mrs. Burroughs took one of his shoulders between her thumb and forefinger, and I took the other, and we held him up. There was a breeze coming through the window and Jack--well, he waved in the breeze.

We closed the window and laid him down again and he tried to explain what had happened. "Professor Einstein wouldn't have liked this!" he moaned. "Something went wrong," he cried, shuddering.

He went on gasping and mumbling, and we gathered that he had hooked up a circuit the wrong way. "I didn't harness the fourth--I chopped off the third dimension! Einstein wouldn't have approved!"

He was relieved to learn that the damage had been confined to himself and the house, so far as we knew. Like the house, Jack had insides, but we don't know where they are. We poured tea down him, and he can eat, after a fashion, but there never is a sign of a lump anywhere.

* * * * *

That night, we pinned him to the bed with clothespins so he wouldn't blow off the bed. Next morning, we rigged a line and pinned him to it so he could sit up.

"I know what to do," he said, "but I would have to go back to the lab. Dad would have to let me have his staff and all sorts of equipment. And he won't do it."

"If he thinks more of his money than he does of his own son," Mrs. Burroughs said, "then he's an unnatural father."

But Jack made us promise not to get in touch with you.

Still, people are beginning to talk. The man from the electric company couldn't find the meter yesterday, because it is attached to the middle of the outside wall and has vanished.

Mr. Gretch, we are parents and we feel that you will not hesitate a moment to do whatever is necessary to get Jack back into shape. So, despite our promise, we are sending Jack to you by registered parcel post, air mail. He doesn't mind the cardboard mailing tube he is rolled up in as he has been sleeping in it, finding it more comfortable than being pinned to the sheets.

Jack is a fine boy, sir, and we hope to hear soon that he is back to normal and doing the work he wants to do.

Very truly yours,

W. Burroughs

P.S. When Jack figures out the re-integration principle, we would appreciate his fixing our house. We get along as usual, but it makes us nervous to live in a house that, strictly speaking, has no insides. W.B.

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Erstwhile rising star Lewis Pullman is seen here on the set of his latest film directly after capturing co-star Dustin Hoffman's runaway pet gerbil, Herbert. "He ran right up my pantsleg!" said young Mr. Pullman, "And, boy, did he smell something awful!" Herbie was last seen being cuddled by Amy Madigan, on set to visit hubby Ed Harris. "Aww, he looks just like Ed's weasel!" which Mr. Harris last showed off in the aptly-titled Sweet Dreams.

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REGINALD'S DRAMA

The Project Gutenberg eBook,
***Reginald*, by Saki**

Reginald closed his eyes with the elaborate weariness of one who has rather nice eyelashes and thinks it useless to conceal the fact.

"One of these days," he said, "I shall write a really great drama. No

one will understand the drift of it, but everyone will go back to their homes with a vague feeling of dissatisfaction with their lives and surroundings. Then they will put up new wall-papers and forget."

"But how about those that have oak panelling all over the house?" said the Other.

"They can always put down new stair-carpets," pursued Reginald, "and, anyhow, I'm not responsible for the audience having a happy ending. The play would be quite sufficient strain on one's energies. I should get a bishop to say it was immoral and beautiful--no dramatist has thought of that before, and everyone would come to condemn the bishop, and they would stay on out of sheer nervousness. After all, it requires a great deal of moral courage to leave in a marked manner in the middle of the second act, when your carriage isn't ordered till twelve. And it would commence with wolves worrying something on a lonely waste--you wouldn't see them, of course; but you would hear them snarling and scrunching, and I should arrange to have a wolfy fragrance suggested across the footlights. It would look so well on the programmes, 'Wolves in the first act, by Jamrach.' And old Lady Whortleberry, who never misses a first night, would scream. She's always been nervous since she lost her first husband. He died quite abruptly while watching a county cricket match; two and a half inches of rain had fallen for seven runs, and it was supposed that the excitement killed him. Anyhow, it gave her quite a shock; it was the first husband she'd lost, you know, and now she always screams if anything thrilling happens too soon after dinner. And after the audience had heard the Whortleberry scream the thing would be fairly launched."

"And the plot?"

"The plot," said Reginald, "would be one of those little everyday tragedies that one sees going on all round one. In my mind's eye there is the case of the Mudge-Jervises, which in an unpretentious way has quite an Enoch Arden intensity underlying it. They'd only been married some eighteen months or so, and circumstances had prevented their seeing much of each other. With him there was always a foursome or something that had to be played and replayed in different parts of the country, and she went in for slumming quite as seriously as if it was a sport. With her, I suppose, it was. She belonged to the Guild of the Poor Dear Souls, and they hold the record for having nearly reformed a washerwoman. No one has ever really reformed a washerwoman, and that is why the competition is so keen. You can rescue charwomen by fifties with a little tea and personal magnetism, but with washerwomen it's different; wages are too high. This particular laundress, who came from Bermondsey or some such place, was really rather a hopeful venture, and they thought at last that she might be safely put in the window as a specimen of successful work. So they had her paraded at a drawing-room "At Home" at Agatha Camelford's; it was sheer bad luck that some liqueur chocolates had been turned loose by mistake among the refreshments--really liqueur chocolates, with very little chocolate. And of course the old soul found them out, and cornered the entire stock. It was like finding a whelk-stall in a desert, as she afterwards partially expressed herself. When the liqueurs began to take effect, she started to give them imitations of farmyard animals as they know them in Bermondsey. She began with a

dancing bear, and you know Agatha doesn't approve of dancing, except at Buckingham Palace under proper supervision. And then she got up on the piano and gave them an organ monkey; I gather she went in for realism rather than a Maeterlinckian treatment of the subject. Finally, she fell into the piano and said she was a parrot in a cage, and for an impromptu performance I believe she was very word-perfect; no one had heard anything like it, except Baroness Boobelstein who has attended sittings of the Austrian Reichsrath. Agatha is trying the Rest-cure at Buxton."

"But the tragedy?"

"Oh, the Mudge-Jervises. Well, they were getting along quite happily, and their married life was one continuous exchange of picture-postcards; and then one day they were thrown together on some neutral ground where foursomes and washerwomen overlapped, and discovered that they were hopelessly divided on the Fiscal Question. They have thought it best to separate, and she is to have the custody of the Persian kittens for nine months in the year--they go back to him for the winter, when she is abroad. There you have the material for a tragedy drawn straight from life--and the piece could be called 'The Price They Paid for Empire.' And of course one would have to work in studies of the struggle of hereditary tendency against environment and all that sort of thing. The woman's father could have been an Envoy to some of the smaller German Courts; that's where she'd get her passion for visiting the poor, in spite of the most careful upbringing. _C'est le premier pa qui compte_, as the cuckoo said when it swallowed its foster-parent. That, I think, is quite clever."

"And the wolves?"

"Oh, the wolves would be a sort of elusive undercurrent in the background that would never be satisfactorily explained. After all, life teems with things that have no earthly reason. And whenever the characters could think of nothing brilliant to say about marriage or the War Office, they could open a window and listen to the howling of the wolves. But that would be very seldom."

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JAKE D'ANNUNZIO SPOUT

The Project Gutenberg EBook of
***Terribly Intimate Portraits*, by Noël Coward**

Why is it that to some are vouchsafed such supreme gifts while other have perforce to drag out their lives in the hideous monotony of offices and banks and the like?

Jake D'Annunzio Spout--even he, Jake the glorious--Spout the magnificent--commenced his career behind the counter of a delicatessen on Ninth Avenue--and now--his name and glory have waved across America like a pennon of victory. I do not intend as others have done to describe every small detail of his early life[17]--I merely wish with a

few brief and decided strokes of the pen to expose to the public his mastery of psychology, his exquisite grace of style and above all his amazing supremacy of grammar. No writer since Steve Montespan Pligger has achieved such stupendous feats of literature and even he--Pligger--failed over his well-remembered attack on an English Duchess, "The Fall of a Bloated Aristocrat." According to contemporary criticisms it appears that through lack of familiarity with his subject he was unable to make her bloated enough--which was a pity as the main bulk of the book was intensely interesting, but Pligger, great as he undoubtedly was, could never aspire to the heights of Spout. Many people on reading Spout's first volume of poems in prose "Autumn in my Garden" were heard to say with a shake of the head, "Pligger's sun has set, we are at the Dawn of a new Era--the Spout Era!" Perhaps the greatest factor in Spout's greatness is his amazing versatility. No one reading "Marie of Chinatown" for the first time would believe the author capable of "Across the Sound for a Wife"! The realistic sordidity of the former balanced against the breathless adventure of the latter, combine in stamping Spout as a genius of the highest order.

The three books he wrote while still working in the delicatessen store are indelibly stamped with the pathos of his environment--"Thoughts in Vinegar," a bitter satire on bohemianism--"Three Little Pickles," an autobiography of the Barrymores as children and "The lonely Anchovy," a whimsical fantasy which if we are to believe Town Topics made Sir James Barrie quite furious.

The story of the sudden recognition of Jake D'Annunzio Spout's genius by the more advanced literary coterie of New York City, etc., is widely known but too charming to leave unmentioned. He was, so we are told, seated on an upturned wooden box behind a pile of cheeses, sunk in a reverie, when suddenly the door opened and three men came into the store.

"We wish to see Jake D'Annunzio Spout," said the foremost with a rich Harvard accent.

Jake rose shyly, knocking a Camembert to the ground in his embarrassment. "I am he," he said blushing.

A grey-haired man sniffed and waved his hand comprehensively. "You must leave these sordid surroundings," he said in a beautifully modulated voice in which a bad cold and a Yale intonation struggled for precedence, "and come with us."

"Where to?" cried Jake clutching a salami sausage with boyish excitement.

All three men doffed their hats.

"To the Coffee House," they said reverently.

"At this point," says Earl Hank in his exquisite study, 'Spout Through and Through,' tears of ecstasy gushed down the boy's cheeks. 'At last,' he cried in a choked voice and swooned.

The three men gathered him up tenderly and carried him out towards the Elevated--"

Of course the salient feature of Hank's study of Spout is the deep love and affection for his subject which permeates every page. Nobody but a true enthusiast and lover of beauty could ever have been so inspired. It was not until reaching the intellectually austere atmosphere of the Coffee House that Spout regained consciousness: he opened his eyes wearily, but the light of dazzled amazement replaced fatigue when he beheld the company that surrounded him--every man's face seemed to be stamped indelibly with the ineffaceable mark of artistic achievement. Spout rose in happy, awed wonderment.

Hands were stretched forth to him in welcome and friendship--one of the younger members gave vent to a furtive cheer but was instantly suppressed. Lunch, we are told, was to the newly-discovered poet a long dream of ecstasy, with the exception of one incident which, though somewhat painful, it is necessary to retail in order to illustrate what havoc habit can work on even the brightest psychologies. Earl Bowles (a descendant of Senator Didcot Bowles--beloved by all) in his rather wordy dissertation on "Intellects of the Hour" presents to us perhaps the most vivid picture of the scene.

"Harvey Pricklebott, for several years editor of 'Art in the Home,' leant forward to the dazed Spout and requested him to pass a plate of cold tongue which was lying near. With businesslike alacrity Spout did so--and then before anyone could prevent it--detached from his belt a delicatessen payment check for 25 cents and pushed it across the table."

"There was a dreadful silence--Spout realising his appalling error endeavoured to pass it off by humming the Jewel Song from Faust. For a moment his nonchalance amazed everyone then as though a veil had been suddenly snatched from their eyes they gave a great cry: 'This is Spout! What Humour! What Roguery! Spout the Brilliant!'"

After this serio-comic contretemps every remark Spout made was hailed by all as a gem of superlative wit.

From the moment of his entrance into the Coffee House, Spout's career was assured--encouraged by his amazing success in a milieu to which many aspired but few attained, he at once wrote about it, probably his most world-famed novel, "The Continuous Fall of Harriet Ramsbotham." To say that this daring attack upon existing social conditions caused a sensation is to put the case mildly--it was a positive literary _tour de force_. Take for example the extraordinarily vital passage in volume two--when Harriet is insulted by Donald at a soda fountain, or the sordidly realistic moment in volume three when she is horsewhipped by Frederick on Long Beach--and above all perhaps those few tense seconds in volume one when Norman having lured her to Childs' for supper brands her left thigh with a flat-iron. Immediately upon publication of this masterpiece Spout received five hundred and ninety-four letters from anxious mothers, eight hundred and two requests for sexual advice from oppressed governesses and several threatening telegrams from the police.

The ordinary everyday novelist would at once have become bombastic and

conceited at being the cause of such a universal upheaval--not so Spout. He retired quite quietly to his cosy kitchenette apartment in Harlem and wrote that charming and winsome essay in sentiment "Mollie's Holiday"--which in due course he followed with his celebrated treatise on reincarnation "A Drop of Blood" and "To Horse, to Horse" a stirring romance of the Civil War.

I will not seek with convincing falsehoods and unscrupulous sophistry to hide the fact that Jake D'Annunzio Spout was never quite a gentleman. Others have endeavoured to do this and to my mind it is not only degrading but quite unworthy of the man's genius to dwell on such paltry failings as bad table manners, slight personal uncleanliness and the like. Many of the greatest men in the world have bitten their nails, and if we are to believe contemporary biographers, even the gloriously verbose Carlyle was known to expectorate frequently and with the utmost abandon while writing his world-famed fantasy "The French Revolution."

Jake Spout was perhaps twenty-six when he met H. Mackenzie Kump the philanthropic millionaire whose intimate study "Spout, as I Knew Him" met with such a brilliant success last year. Kump it was who cajoled and eventually almost by force persuaded Jake to make a tour of the world. Kump it was who nursed him devotedly through malaria in Mombasa, dysentery in Delhi, hernia in Hong Kong, cramp in Cape Town and acute earache in Edinburgh, and who soothed his bedside with almost womanly tenderness during his fearful outbreak of varicose veins in Vancouver. The work Spout accomplished in spite of slightly adverse circumstances while abroad was quite stupendous and had it not been for his tragic marriage would doubtless have been published with alacrity and read by millions. It was presumably the will of an unkind fate that he should be pursued and eventually captured by Esmé Chaddle--a woman not only without scruples of any description but possessing a revoltingly ugly face and the temper of a fiend. It was on their honeymoon that she became suddenly cross at breakfast and burnt all the unpublished MSS. that she could find in the back yard, thereby destroying heartlessly the luscious fruits of untold labour while abroad. Spout with the contradictory stubbornness characteristic of so many geniuses continued--though very hurt--to adore his vixenish wife with the blind concentrated passion which for so many years had impregnated his work and now, alas, was running to waste on such an unyielding desert. His literary friends and admirers one and all shook their heads sadly, perceiving reluctantly that the end was in sight. For two years Spout wrote nothing but three short articles,[18] then as though some premonition of impending disaster touched with flaming wings the sleeping carcase of his talent he sat down and wrote his soul-searching national appeal "Hist." This he completed on his thirty-first birthday.

For a true and sincere description of that last tragic night we must turn to Richard Floop--whose love for Spout has lent his pen so much glamour and poetry.

"Dusk was falling when Jake stole softly out through the scullery door and clambered on the char-à-banc for Coney Island. On arrival at that home of gaiety and irresponsibility he forgot his troubles--his sordid domestic upheavals--even his talent he suppressed and merged himself like an ordinary human being into the mad spirit of carnival. With

boyish shouts he rolled on the joy-wheel; with childish gurgles he bestrode strange and jolting painted horses and waved his hat daringly when the merry-go-round was at its fastest. His excitement on the helter-skelter knew no bounds--while his delighted screams in the river caves called forth many appreciative raspberries from the friendly crowds. With no presentiment that this evening of unadulterated ecstasy was to be the culminating and final sensation in his eventful life he stepped into that fatal compartment on the big wheel--from which a quarter of an hour later he hurtled when at an enormous height from the ground!"

There ends Floop's beautiful and heart-breaking picture of the death of a great and wonderful man. Some say it was suicide--others that he was merely leaning out too far in admiration of the view. Who knows what really inspired that sudden fierce rush to death? But whatever the cause there is one fact that remains--shining like a star above the squalid wreck of his latter years--he died happy. The indisputable proof of this can be obtained from perusal of the first line of a poem which was discovered in his breast pocket:

"All Hail to Fun and Merriment--"

The less widely-known works of Jake D'Annunzio Spout are as follows:

"Sun-dappled Dreams," a book of poems.
"Through Bavaria with a Note-book."
"The Sin of Pharoah Bubster."

and:

"With Lincoln in Calcutta," a Fantasy.

Fountain-pen pieces and ever-sharp pencil in collection of H. Mackenzie Kump.

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RIP, HAWKEYE.

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Uncle Wellington's Wives

The Project Gutenberg eBook,
***The Wife of his Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line, and Selected Essays*,**
by Charles Waddell Chesnutt

I

Uncle Wellington Braboy was so deeply absorbed in thought as he walked slowly homeward from the weekly meeting of the Union League, that he let his pipe go out, a fact of which he remained oblivious until he had reached the little frame house in the suburbs of Patesville, where he lived with aunt Milly, his wife. On this particular occasion the club had been addressed by a visiting brother from the North, Professor Patterson, a tall, well-formed mulatto, who wore a perfectly fitting suit of broadcloth, a shiny silk hat, and linen of dazzling whiteness,--in short, a gentleman of such distinguished appearance that the doors and windows of the offices and stores on Front Street were filled with curious observers as he passed through that thoroughfare in the early part of the day. This polished stranger was a traveling organizer of Masonic lodges, but he also claimed to be a high officer in the Union League, and had been invited to lecture before the local chapter of that organization at Patesville.

The lecture had been largely attended, and uncle* Wellington Braboy had occupied a seat just in front of the platform. The subject of the lecture was "The Mental, Moral, Physical, Political, Social, and Financial Improvement of the Negro Race in America," a theme much dwelt upon, with slight variations, by colored orators. For to this struggling people, then as now, the problem of their uncertain present and their doubtful future was the chief concern of life. The period was the hopeful one. The Federal Government retained some vestige of authority in the South, and the newly emancipated race cherished the delusion that under the Constitution, that enduring rock on which our liberties are founded, and under the equal laws it purported to guarantee, they would enter upon the era of freedom and opportunity which their Northern friends had inaugurated with such solemn sanctions. The speaker pictured in eloquent language the state of ideal equality and happiness enjoyed by colored people at the North: how they sent their children to school with the white children; how they sat by white people in the churches and theatres, ate with them in the public restaurants, and buried their dead in the same cemeteries. The professor waxed eloquent with the development of his theme, and, as a finishing touch to an alluring picture, assured the excited audience that the intermarriage of the races was common, and that he himself had espoused a white woman.

Uncle Wellington Braboy was a deeply interested listener. He had heard

something of these facts before, but his information had always come in such vague and questionable shape that he had paid little attention to it. He knew that the Yankees had freed the slaves, and that runaway negroes had always gone to the North to seek liberty; any such equality, however, as the visiting brother had depicted, was more than uncle Wellington had ever conceived as actually existing anywhere in the world. At first he felt inclined to doubt the truth of the speaker's statements; but the cut of his clothes, the eloquence of his language, and the flowing length of his whiskers, were so far superior to anything uncle Wellington had ever met among the colored people of his native State, that he felt irresistibly impelled to the conviction that nothing less than the advantages claimed for the North by the visiting brother could have produced such an exquisite flower of civilization. Any lingering doubts uncle Wellington may have felt were entirely dispelled by the courtly bow and cordial grasp of the hand with which the visiting brother acknowledged the congratulations showered upon him by the audience at the close of his address.

The more uncle Wellington's mind dwelt upon the professor's speech, the more attractive seemed the picture of Northern life presented. Uncle Wellington possessed in large measure the imaginative faculty so freely bestowed by nature upon the race from which the darker half of his blood was drawn. He had indulged in occasional day-dreams of an ideal state of social equality, but his wildest flights of fancy had never located it nearer than heaven, and he had felt some misgivings about its practical working even there. Its desirability he had never doubted, and the speech of the evening before had given a local habitation and a name to the forms his imagination had bodied forth. Giving full rein to his fancy, he saw in the North a land flowing with milk and honey,--a land peopled by noble men and beautiful women, among whom colored men and women moved with the ease and grace of acknowledged right. Then he placed himself in the foreground of the picture. What a fine figure he would have made in the world if he had been born at the free North! He imagined himself dressed like the professor, and passing the contribution-box in a white church; and most pleasant of his dreams, and the hardest to realize as possible, was that of the gracious white lady he might have called wife. Uncle Wellington was a mulatto, and his features were those of his white father, though tinged with the hue of his mother's race; and as he lifted the kerosene lamp at evening, and took a long look at his image in the little mirror over the mantelpiece, he said to himself that he was a very good-looking man, and could have adorned a much higher sphere in life than that in which the accident of birth had placed him. He fell asleep and dreamed that he lived in a two-story brick house, with a spacious flower garden in front, the whole inclosed by a high iron fence; that he kept a carriage and servants, and never did a stroke of work. This was the highest style of living in Patesville, and he could conceive of nothing finer.

Uncle Wellington slept later than usual the next morning, and the sunlight was pouring in at the open window of the bedroom, when his dreams were interrupted by the voice of his wife, in tones meant to be harsh, but which no ordinary degree of passion could rob of their native unctuousness.

"Git up f'm dere, you lazy, good-fuh-nuffin' nigger! Is you gwine ter

sleep all de mawnin'? I 's ti'ed er dis yer runnin' 'roun' all night an' den sleepin' all day. You won't git dat tater patch hoed ovuh ter-day 'less'n you git up f'm dere an' git at it."

Uncle Wellington rolled over, yawned cavernously, stretched himself, and with a muttered protest got out of bed and put on his clothes. Aunt Milly had prepared a smoking breakfast of hominy and fried bacon, the odor of which was very grateful to his nostrils.

"Is breakfus' done ready?" he inquired, tentatively, as he came into the kitchen and glanced at the table.

"No, it ain't ready, an' 't ain't gwine ter be ready 'tel you tote dat wood an' water in," replied aunt Milly severely, as she poured two teacups of boiling water on two tablespoonfuls of ground coffee.

Uncle Wellington went down to the spring and got a pail of water, after which he brought in some oak logs for the fire place and some lightwood for kindling. Then he drew a chair towards the table and started to sit down.

"Wonduh what 's de matter wid you dis mawnin' anyhow," remarked aunt Milly. "You must 'a' be'n up ter some devilment las' night, fer yo' recommemb'ance is so po' dat you fus' fergit ter git up, an' den fergit ter wash yo' face an' hands fo' you set down ter de table. I don' 'low nobody ter eat at my table dat a-way."

"I don' see no use 'n washin' 'em so much," replied Wellington wearily. "Dey gits dirty ag'in right off, an' den you got ter wash 'em ovuh ag'in; it 's jes' pilin' up wuk what don' fetch in nuffin'. De dirt don' show nohow, 'n' I don' see no advantage in bein' black, ef you got to keep on washin' yo' face 'n' han's jes' lack w'ite folks." He nevertheless performed his ablutions in a perfunctory way, and resumed his seat at the breakfast-table.

"Ole 'oman," he asked, after the edge of his appetite had been taken off, "how would you lack ter live at de Norf?"

"I dunno nuffin' 'bout de Norf," replied aunt Milly. "It 's hard 'nuff ter git erlong heah, whar we knows all erbout it."

"De brother what 'dressed de meetin' las' night say dat de wages at de Norf is twicet ez big ez dey is heah."

"You could make a sight mo' wages heah ef you 'd 'ten' ter yo' wuk better," replied aunt Milly.

Uncle Wellington ignored this personality, and continued, "An' he say de cullud folks got all de privileges er de w'ite folks,--dat dey chillen goes ter school tergedder, dat dey sets on same seats in chu'ch, an' sarves on jury, 'n' rides on de kyars an' steamboats wid de w'ite folks, an' eats at de fus' table."

"Dat 'u'd suit you," chuckled aunt Milly, "an' you 'd stay dere fer de secon' table, too. How dis man know 'bout all dis yer foolis'ness?" she

asked incredulously.

"He come f'm de Norf," said uncle Wellington, "an' he 'speunced it all hisse'f."

"Well, he can't make me b'lieve it," she rejoined, with a shake of her head.

"An' you would n' lack ter go up dere an' 'joy all dese privileges?" asked uncle Wellington, with some degree of earnestness.

The old woman laughed until her sides shook. "Who gwine ter take me up dere?" she inquired.

"You got de money yo'se'f."

"I ain' got no money fer ter was'e," she replied shortly, becoming serious at once; and with that the subject was dropped.

Uncle Wellington pulled a hoe from under the house, and took his way wearily to the potato patch. He did not feel like working, but aunt Milly was the undisputed head of the establishment, and he did not dare to openly neglect his work.

In fact, he regarded work at any time as a disagreeable necessity to be avoided as much as possible.

His wife was cast in a different mould. Externally she would have impressed the casual observer as a neat, well-preserved, and good-looking black woman, of middle age, every curve of whose ample figure--and her figure was all curves--was suggestive of repose. So far from being indolent, or even deliberate in her movements, she was the most active and energetic woman in the town. She went through the physical exercises of a prayer-meeting with astonishing vigor. It was exhilarating to see her wash a shirt, and a study to watch her do it up. A quick jerk shook out the dampened garment; one pass of her ample palm spread it over the ironing-board, and a few well-directed strokes with the iron accomplished what would have occupied the ordinary laundress for half an hour.

To this uncommon, and in uncle Wellington's opinion unnecessary and unnatural activity, his own habits were a steady protest. If aunt Milly had been willing to support him in idleness, he would have acquiesced without a murmur in her habits of industry. This she would not do, and, moreover, insisted on his working at least half the time. If she had invested the proceeds of her labor in rich food and fine clothing, he might have endured it better; but to her passion for work was added a most detestable thrift. She absolutely refused to pay for Wellington's clothes, and required him to furnish a certain proportion of the family supplies. Her savings were carefully put by, and with them she had bought and paid for the modest cottage which she and her husband occupied. Under her careful hand it was always neat and clean; in summer the little yard was gay with bright-colored flowers, and woe to the heedless pickaninny who should stray into her yard and pluck a rose or a verbena! In a stout oaken chest under her bed she kept a capacious

stocking, into which flowed a steady stream of fractional currency. She carried the key to this chest in her pocket, a proceeding regarded by uncle Wellington with no little disfavor. He was of the opinion--an opinion he would not have dared to assert in her presence--that his wife's earnings were his own property; and he looked upon this stocking as a drunkard's wife might regard the saloon which absorbed her husband's wages.

Uncle Wellington hurried over the potato patch on the morning of the conversation above recorded, and as soon as he saw aunt Milly go away with a basket of clothes on her head, returned to the house, put on his coat, and went uptown.

He directed his steps to a small frame building fronting on the main street of the village, at a point where the street was intersected by one of the several creeks meandering through the town, cooling the air, providing numerous swimming-holes for the amphibious small boy, and furnishing water-power for grist-mills and saw-mills. The rear of the building rested on long brick pillars, built up from the bottom of the steep bank of the creek, while the front was level with the street. This was the office of Mr. Matthew Wright, the sole representative of the colored race at the bar of Chinquapin County. Mr. Wright came of an "old issue" free colored family, in which, though the negro blood was present in an attenuated strain, a line of free ancestry could be traced beyond the Revolutionary War. He had enjoyed exceptional opportunities, and enjoyed the distinction of being the first, and for a long time the only colored lawyer in North Carolina. His services were frequently called into requisition by impecunious people of his own race; when they had money they went to white lawyers, who, they shrewdly conjectured, would have more influence with judge or jury than a colored lawyer, however able.

Uncle Wellington found Mr. Wright in his office. Having inquired after the health of the lawyer's family and all his relations in detail, uncle Wellington asked for a professional opinion.

"Mistah Wright, ef a man's wife got money, whose money is dat befo' de law--his'n er her'n?"

The lawyer put on his professional air, and replied:----

"Under the common law, which in default of special legislative enactment is the law of North Carolina, the personal property of the wife belongs to her husband."

"But dat don' jes' tech de p'int, suh. I wuz axin' 'bout money."

"You see, uncle Wellington, your education has not rendered you familiar with legal phraseology. The term 'personal property' or 'estate' embraces, according to Blackstone, all property other than land, and therefore includes money. Any money a man's wife has is his, constructively, and will be recognized as his actually, as soon as he can secure possession of it."

"Dat is ter say, suh--my eddication don' quite 'low me ter understan'

dat--dat is ter say"----

"That is to say, it 's yours when you get it. It is n't yours so that the law will help you get it; but on the other hand, when you once lay your hands on it, it is yours so that the law won't take it away from you."

Uncle Wellington nodded to express his full comprehension of the law as expounded by Mr. Wright, but scratched his head in a way that expressed some disappointment. The law seemed to wobble. Instead of enabling him to stand up fearlessly and demand his own, it threw him back upon his own efforts; and the prospect of his being able to overpower or outwit aunt Milly by any ordinary means was very poor.

He did not leave the office, but hung around awhile as though there were something further he wished to speak about. Finally, after some discursive remarks about the crops and politics, he asked, in an offhand, disinterested manner, as though the thought had just occurred to him:----

"Mistah Wright, w'ile's we 're talkin' 'bout law matters, what do it cos' ter git a defoce?"

"That depends upon circumstances. It is n't altogether a matter of expense. Have you and aunt Milly been having trouble?"

"Oh no, suh; I was jes' a-wond'rin'."

"You see," continued the lawyer, who was fond of talking, and had nothing else to do for the moment, "a divorce is not an easy thing to get in this State under any circumstances. It used to be the law that divorce could be granted only by special act of the legislature; and it is but recently that the subject has been relegated to the jurisdiction of the courts."

Uncle Wellington understood a part of this, but the answer had not been exactly to the point in his mind.

"S'pos'n', den, jes' fer de argyment, me an' my ole 'oman sh'd fall out en wanter separate, how could I git a defoce?"

"That would depend on what you quarreled about. It 's pretty hard work to answer general questions in a particular way. If you merely wished to separate, it would n't be necessary to get a divorce; but if you should want to marry again, you would have to be divorced, or else you would be guilty of bigamy, and could be sent to the penitentiary. But, by the way, uncle Wellington, when were you married?"

"I got married 'fo' de wah, when I was livin' down on Rockfish Creek."

"When you were in slavery?"

"Yas, suh."

"Did you have your marriage registered after the surrender?"

"No, suh; never knowed nuffin' 'bout dat."

After the war, in North Carolina and other States, the freed people who had sustained to each other the relation of husband and wife as it existed among slaves, were required by law to register their consent to continue in the marriage relation. By this simple expedient their former marriages of convenience received the sanction of law, and their children the seal of legitimacy. In many cases, however, where the parties lived in districts remote from the larger towns, the ceremony was neglected, or never heard of by the freedmen.

"Well," said the lawyer, "if that is the case, and you and aunt Milly should disagree, it would n't be necessary for you to get a divorce, even if you should want to marry again. You were never legally married."

"So Milly ain't my lawful wife, den?"

"She may be your wife in one sense of the word, but not in such a sense as to render you liable to punishment for bigamy if you should marry another woman. But I hope you will never want to do anything of the kind, for you have a very good wife now."

Uncle Wellington went away thoughtfully, but with a feeling of unaccustomed lightness and freedom. He had not felt so free since the memorable day when he had first heard of the Emancipation Proclamation. On leaving the lawyer's office, he called at the workshop of one of his friends, Peter Williams, a shoemaker by trade, who had a brother living in Ohio.

"Is you hearn f'm Sam lately?" uncle Wellington inquired, after the conversation had drifted through the usual generalities.

"His mammy got er letter f'm 'im las' week; he 's livin' in de town er Groveland now."

"How 's he gittin' on?"

"He says he gittin' on monst'us well. He 'low ez how he make five dollars a day w'ite-washin', an' have all he kin do."

The shoemaker related various details of his brother's prosperity, and uncle Wellington returned home in a very thoughtful mood, revolving in his mind a plan of future action. This plan had been vaguely assuming form ever since the professor's lecture, and the events of the morning had brought out the detail in bold relief.

Two days after the conversation with the shoemaker, aunt Milly went, in the afternoon, to visit a sister of hers who lived several miles out in the country. During her absence, which lasted until nightfall, uncle Wellington went uptown and purchased a cheap oilcloth valise from a shrewd son of Israel, who had penetrated to this locality with a stock of notions and cheap clothing. Uncle Wellington had his purchase done up in brown paper, and took the parcel under his arm. Arrived at home he unwrapped the valise, and thrust into its capacious jaws his best suit

of clothes, some underwear, and a few other small articles for personal use and adornment. Then he carried the valise out into the yard, and, first looking cautiously around to see if there was any one in sight, concealed it in a clump of bushes in a corner of the yard.

It may be inferred from this proceeding that uncle Wellington was preparing for a step of some consequence. In fact, he had fully made up his mind to go to the North; but he still lacked the most important requisite for traveling with comfort, namely, the money to pay his expenses. The idea of tramping the distance which separated him from the promised land of liberty and equality had never occurred to him. When a slave, he had several times been importuned by fellow servants to join them in the attempt to escape from bondage, but he had never wanted his freedom badly enough to walk a thousand miles for it; if he could have gone to Canada by stage-coach, or by rail, or on horseback, with stops for regular meals, he would probably have undertaken the trip. The funds he now needed for his journey were in aunt Milly's chest. He had thought a great deal about his right to this money. It was his wife's savings, and he had never dared to dispute, openly, her right to exercise exclusive control over what she earned; but the lawyer had assured him of his right to the money, of which he was already constructively in possession, and he had therefore determined to possess himself actually of the coveted stocking. It was impracticable for him to get the key of the chest. Aunt Milly kept it in her pocket by day and under her pillow at night. She was a light sleeper, and, if not awakened by the abstraction of the key, would certainly have been disturbed by the unlocking of the chest. But one alternative remained, and that was to break open the chest in her absence.

There was a revival in progress at the colored Methodist church. Aunt Milly was as energetic in her religion as in other respects, and had not missed a single one of the meetings. She returned at nightfall from her visit to the country and prepared a frugal supper. Uncle Wellington did not eat as heartily as usual. Aunt Milly perceived his want of appetite, and spoke of it. He explained it by saying that he did not feel very well.

"Is you gwine ter chu'ch ter-night?" inquired his wife.

"I reckon I 'll stay home an' go ter bed," he replied. "I ain't be'n feelin' well dis evenin', an' I 'spec' I better git a good night's res'."

"Well, you kin stay ef you mineter. Good preachin' 'u'd make you feel better, but ef you ain't gwine, don' fergit ter tote in some wood an' lighterd 'fo' you go ter bed. De moon is shinin' bright, an' you can't have no 'scuse 'bout not bein' able ter see."

Uncle Wellington followed her out to the gate, and watched her receding form until it disappeared in the distance. Then he re-entered the house with a quick step, and taking a hatchet from a corner of the room, drew the chest from under the bed. As he applied the hatchet to the fastenings, a thought struck him, and by the flickering light of the pine-knot blazing on the hearth, a look of hesitation might have been seen to take the place of the determined expression his face had worn up

to that time. He had argued himself into the belief that his present action was lawful and justifiable. Though this conviction had not prevented him from trembling in every limb, as though he were committing a mere vulgar theft, it had still nerved him to the deed. Now even his moral courage began to weaken. The lawyer had told him that his wife's property was his own; in taking it he was therefore only exercising his lawful right. But at the point of breaking open the chest, it occurred to him that he was taking this money in order to get away from aunt Milly, and that he justified his desertion of her by the lawyer's opinion that she was not his lawful wife. If she was not his wife, then he had no right to take the money; if she was his wife, he had no right to desert her, and would certainly have no right to marry another woman. His scheme was about to go to shipwreck on this rock, when another idea occurred to him.

"De lawyer say dat in one sense er de word de ole 'oman is my wife, an' in anudder sense er de word she ain't my wife. Ef I goes ter de Norf an' marry a w'ite 'oman, I ain't commit no brigamy, 'caze in dat sense er de word she ain't my wife; but ef I takes dis money, I ain't stealin' it, 'caze in dat sense er de word she is my wife. Dat 'splains all de trouble away."

Having reached this ingenious conclusion, uncle Wellington applied the hatchet vigorously, soon loosened the fastenings of the chest, and with trembling hands extracted from its depths a capacious blue cotton stocking. He emptied the stocking on the table. His first impulse was to take the whole, but again there arose in his mind a doubt--a very obtrusive, unreasonable doubt, but a doubt, nevertheless--of the absolute rectitude of his conduct; and after a moment's hesitation he hurriedly counted the money--it was in bills of small denominations--and found it to be about two hundred and fifty dollars. He then divided it into two piles of one hundred and twenty-five dollars each. He put one pile into his pocket, returned the remainder to the stocking, and replaced it where he had found it. He then closed the chest and shoved it under the bed. After having arranged the fire so that it could safely be left burning, he took a last look around the room, and went out into the moonlight, locking the door behind him, and hanging the key on a nail in the wall, where his wife would be likely to look for it. He then secured his valise from behind the bushes, and left the yard. As he passed by the wood-pile, he said to himself:----

"Well, I declar' ef I ain't done fergot ter tote in dat lighterd; I reckon de ole 'oman 'll ha' ter fetch it in herse'f dis time."

He hastened through the quiet streets, avoiding the few people who were abroad at that hour, and soon reached the railroad station, from which a North-bound train left at nine o'clock. He went around to the dark side of the train, and climbed into a second-class car, where he shrank into the darkest corner and turned his face away from the dim light of the single dirty lamp. There were no passengers in the car except one or two sleepy negroes, who had got on at some other station, and a white man who had gone into the car to smoke, accompanied by a gigantic bloodhound.

Finally the train crept out of the station. From the window uncle

Wellington looked out upon the familiar cabins and turpentine stills, the new barrel factory, the brickyard where he had once worked for some time; and as the train rattled through the outskirts of the town, he saw gleaming in the moonlight the white headstones of the colored cemetery where his only daughter had been buried several years before.

Presently the conductor came around. Uncle Wellington had not bought a ticket, and the conductor collected a cash fare. He was not acquainted with uncle Wellington, but had just had a drink at the saloon near the depot, and felt at peace with all mankind.

"Where are you going, uncle?" he inquired carelessly.

Uncle Wellington's face assumed the ashen hue which does duty for pallor in dusky countenances, and his knees began to tremble. Controlling his voice as well as he could, he replied that he was going up to Jonesboro, the terminus of the railroad, to work for a gentleman at that place. He felt immensely relieved when the conductor pocketed the fare, picked up his lantern, and moved away. It was very unphilosophical and very absurd that a man who was only doing right should feel like a thief, shrink from the sight of other people, and lie instinctively. Fine distinctions were not in uncle Wellington's line, but he was struck by the unreasonableness of his feelings, and still more by the discomfort they caused him. By and by, however, the motion of the train made him drowsy; his thoughts all ran together in confusion; and he fell asleep with his head on his valise, and one hand in his pocket, clasped tightly around the roll of money.

II

The train from Pittsburg drew into the Union Depot at Groveland, Ohio, one morning in the spring of 187-, with bell ringing and engine puffing; and from a smoking-car emerged the form of uncle Wellington Braboy, a little dusty and travel-stained, and with a sleepy look about his eyes. He mingled in the crowd, and, valise in hand, moved toward the main exit from the depot. There were several tracks to be crossed, and more than once a watchman snatched him out of the way of a baggage-truck, or a train backing into the depot. He at length reached the door, beyond which, and as near as the regulations would permit, stood a number of hackmen, vociferously soliciting patronage. One of them, a colored man, soon secured several passengers. As he closed the door after the last one he turned to uncle Wellington, who stood near him on the sidewalk, looking about irresolutely.

"Is you goin' uptown?" asked the hackman, as he prepared to mount the box.

"Yas, suh."

"I 'll take you up fo' a quahtah, ef you want ter git up here an' ride on de box wid me."

Uncle Wellington accepted the offer and mounted the box. The hackman whipped up his horses, the carriage climbed the steep hill leading up to the town, and the passengers inside were soon deposited at their hotels.

"Whereabouts do you want to go?" asked the hackman of uncle Wellington, when the carriage was emptied of its last passengers.

"I want ter go ter Brer Sam Williams's," said Wellington.

"What 's his street an' number?"

Uncle Wellington did not know the street and number, and the hackman had to explain to him the mystery of numbered houses, to which he was a total stranger.

"Where is he from?" asked the hackman, "and what is his business?"

"He is f'm Norf Ca'lina," replied uncle Wellington, "an' makes his livin' w'itewashin'."

"I reckon I knows de man," said the hackman. "I 'spec' he 's changed his name. De man I knows is name' Johnson. He b'longs ter my chu'ch. I 'm gwine out dat way ter git a passenger fer de ten o'clock train, an I 'll take you by dere."

They followed one of the least handsome streets of the city for more than a mile, turned into a cross street, and drew up before a small frame house, from the front of which a sign, painted in white upon a black background, announced to the reading public, in letters inclined to each other at various angles, that whitewashing and kalsomining were "dun" there. A knock at the door brought out a slatternly looking colored woman. She had evidently been disturbed at her toilet, for she held a comb in one hand, and the hair on one side of her head stood out loosely, while on the other side it was braided close to her head. She called her husband, who proved to be the Patesville shoemaker's brother. The hackman introduced the traveler, whose name he had learned on the way out, collected his quarter, and drove away.

Mr. Johnson, the shoemaker's brother, welcomed uncle Wellington to Groveland, and listened with eager delight to the news of the old town, from which he himself had run away many years before, and followed the North Star to Groveland. He had changed his name from "Williams" to "Johnson," on account of the Fugitive Slave Law, which, at the time of his escape from bondage, had rendered it advisable for runaway slaves to court obscurity. After the war he had retained the adopted name. Mrs. Johnson prepared breakfast for her guest, who ate it with an appetite sharpened by his journey. After breakfast he went to bed, and slept until late in the afternoon.

After supper Mr. Johnson took uncle Wellington to visit some of the neighbors who had come from North Carolina before the war. They all expressed much pleasure at meeting "Mr. Braboy," a title which at first sounded a little odd to uncle Wellington. At home he had been "Wellin'ton," "Brer Wellin'ton," or "uncle Wellin'ton;" it was a novel experience to be called "Mister," and he set it down, with secret

satisfaction, as one of the first fruits of Northern liberty.

"Would you lack ter look 'roun' de town a little?" asked Mr. Johnson at breakfast next morning. "I ain' got no job dis mawnin', an' I kin show you some er de sights."

Uncle Wellington acquiesced in this arrangement, and they walked up to the corner to the street-car line. In a few moments a car passed. Mr. Johnson jumped on the moving car, and uncle Wellington followed his example, at the risk of life or limb, as it was his first experience of street cars.

There was only one vacant seat in the car and that was between two white women in the forward end. Mr. Johnson motioned to the seat, but Wellington shrank from walking between those two rows of white people, to say nothing of sitting between the two women, so he remained standing in the rear part of the car. A moment later, as the car rounded a short curve, he was pitched sidewise into the lap of a stout woman magnificently attired in a ruffled blue calico gown. The lady colored up, and uncle Wellington, as he struggled to his feet amid the laughter of the passengers, was absolutely helpless with embarrassment, until the conductor came up behind him and pushed him toward the vacant place.

"Sit down, will you," he said; and before uncle Wellington could collect himself, he was seated between the two white women. Everybody in the car seemed to be looking at him. But he came to the conclusion, after he had pulled himself together and reflected a few moments, that he would find this method of locomotion pleasanter when he got used to it, and then he could score one more glorious privilege gained by his change of residence.

They got off at the public square, in the heart of the city, where there were flowers and statues, and fountains playing. Mr. Johnson pointed out the court-house, the post-office, the jail, and other public buildings fronting on the square. They visited the market near by, and from an elevated point, looked down upon the extensive lumber yards and factories that were the chief sources of the city's prosperity. Beyond these they could see the fleet of ships that lined the coal and iron ore docks of the harbor. Mr. Johnson, who was quite a fluent talker, enlarged upon the wealth and prosperity of the city; and Wellington, who had never before been in a town of more than three thousand inhabitants, manifested sufficient interest and wonder to satisfy the most exacting _cicerone_. They called at the office of a colored lawyer and member of the legislature, formerly from North Carolina, who, scenting a new constituent and a possible client, greeted the stranger warmly, and in flowing speech pointed out the superior advantages of life at the North, citing himself as an illustration of the possibilities of life in a country really free. As they wended their way homeward to dinner uncle Wellington, with quickened pulse and rising hopes, felt that this was indeed the promised land, and that it must be flowing with milk and honey.

Uncle Wellington remained at the residence of Mr. Johnson for several weeks before making any effort to find employment. He spent this period in looking about the city. The most commonplace things possessed for him

the charm of novelty, and he had come prepared to admire. Shortly after his arrival, he had offered to pay for his board, intimating at the same time that he had plenty of money. Mr. Johnson declined to accept anything from him for board, and expressed himself as being only too proud to have Mr. Braboy remain in the house on the footing of an honored guest, until he had settled himself. He lightened in some degree, however, the burden of obligation under which a prolonged stay on these terms would have placed his guest, by soliciting from the latter occasional small loans, until uncle Wellington's roll of money began to lose its plumpness, and with an empty pocket staring him in the face, he felt the necessity of finding something to do.

During his residence in the city he had met several times his first acquaintance, Mr. Peterson, the hackman, who from time to time inquired how he was getting along. On one of these occasions Wellington mentioned his willingness to accept employment. As good luck would have it, Mr. Peterson knew of a vacant situation. He had formerly been coachman for a wealthy gentleman residing on Oakwood Avenue, but had resigned the situation to go into business for himself. His place had been filled by an Irishman, who had just been discharged for drunkenness, and the gentleman that very day had sent word to Mr. Peterson, asking him if he could recommend a competent and trustworthy coachman.

"Does you know anything erbout hosses?" asked Mr. Peterson.

"Yas, indeed, I does," said Wellington. "I wuz raise' 'mongs' hosses."

"I tol' my ole boss I 'd look out fer a man, an' ef you reckon you kin fill de 'quirements er de situation, I 'll take yo' roun' dere ter-morrer mornin'. You wants ter put on yo' bes' clothes an' slick up, fer dey 're partic'lar people. Ef you git de place I 'll expec' you ter pay me fer de time I lose in 'tendin' ter yo' business, fer time is money in dis country, an' folks don't do much fer nuthin'."

Next morning Wellington blacked his shoes carefully, put on a clean collar, and with the aid of Mrs. Johnson tied his cravat in a jaunty bow which gave him quite a sprightly air and a much younger look than his years warranted. Mr. Peterson called for him at eight o'clock. After traversing several cross streets they turned into Oakwood Avenue and walked along the finest part of it for about half a mile. The handsome houses of this famous avenue, the stately trees, the wide-spreading lawns, dotted with flower beds, fountains and statuary, made up a picture so far surpassing anything in Wellington's experience as to fill him with an almost oppressive sense of its beauty.

"Hit looks lack hebben," he said softly.

"It 's a pootty fine street," rejoined his companion, with a judicial air, "but I don't like dem big lawns. It 's too much trouble ter keep de grass down. One er dem lawns is big enough to pasture a couple er cows."

They went down a street running at right angles to the avenue, and turned into the rear of the corner lot. A large building of pressed brick, trimmed with stone, loomed up before them.

"Do de gemman lib in dis house?" asked Wellington, gazing with awe at the front of the building.

"No, dat 's de barn," said Mr. Peterson with good-natured contempt; and leading the way past a clump of shrubbery to the dwelling-house, he went up the back steps and rang the door-bell.

The ring was answered by a buxom Irishwoman, of a natural freshness of complexion deepened to a fiery red by the heat of a kitchen range. Wellington thought he had seen her before, but his mind had received so many new impressions lately that it was a minute or two before he recognized in her the lady whose lap he had involuntarily occupied for a moment on his first day in Groveland.

"Faith," she exclaimed as she admitted them, "an' it 's mighty glad I am to see ye ag'in, Misther Payterson! An' how hev ye be'n, Misther Payterson, sence I see ye lahst?"

"Middlin' well, Mis' Flannigan, middlin' well, 'ceptin' a tech er de rheumatiz. S'pose you be'n doin' well as usual?"

"Oh yis, as well as a dacent woman could do wid a drunken baste about the place like the lahst coachman. O Misther Payterson, it would make yer heart bleed to see the way the spalpeen cut up a-Saturday! But Misther Todd discharged 'im the same avenin', widout a characther, bad 'cess to 'im, an' we 've had no coachman sence at all, at all. An' it 's sorry I am"----

The lady's flow of eloquence was interrupted at this point by the appearance of Mr. Todd himself, who had been informed of the men's arrival. He asked some questions in regard to Wellington's qualifications and former experience, and in view of his recent arrival in the city was willing to accept Mr. Peterson's recommendation instead of a reference. He said a few words about the nature of the work, and stated his willingness to pay Wellington the wages formerly allowed Mr. Peterson, thirty dollars a month and board and lodging.

This handsome offer was eagerly accepted, and it was agreed that Wellington's term of service should begin immediately. Mr. Peterson, being familiar with the work, and financially interested, conducted the new coachman through the stables and showed him what he would have to do. The silver-mounted harness, the variety of carriages, the names of which he learned for the first time, the arrangements for feeding and watering the horses,--these appointments of a rich man's stable impressed Wellington very much, and he wondered that so much luxury should be wasted on mere horses. The room assigned to him, in the second story of the barn, was a finer apartment than he had ever slept in; and the salary attached to the situation was greater than the combined monthly earnings of himself and aunt Milly in their Southern home. Surely, he thought, his lines had fallen in pleasant places.

Under the stimulus of new surroundings Wellington applied himself diligently to work, and, with the occasional advice of Mr. Peterson, soon mastered the details of his employment. He found the female

servants, with whom he took his meals, very amiable ladies. The cook, Mrs. Katie Flannigan, was a widow. Her husband, a sailor, had been lost at sea. She was a woman of many words, and when she was not lamenting the late Flannigan's loss,--according to her story he had been a model of all the virtues,--she would turn the batteries of her tongue against the former coachman. This gentleman, as Wellington gathered from frequent remarks dropped by Mrs. Flannigan, had paid her attentions clearly susceptible of a serious construction. These attentions had not borne their legitimate fruit, and she was still a widow unconsoled,--hence Mrs. Flannigan's tears. The housemaid was a plump, good-natured German girl, with a pronounced German accent. The presence on washdays of a Bohemian laundress, of recent importation, added another to the variety of ways in which the English tongue was mutilated in Mr. Todd's kitchen. Association with the white women drew out all the native gallantry of the mulatto, and Wellington developed quite a helpful turn. His politeness, his willingness to lend a hand in kitchen or laundry, and the fact that he was the only male servant on the place, combined to make him a prime favorite in the servants' quarters.

It was the general opinion among Wellington's acquaintances that he was a single man. He had come to the city alone, had never been heard to speak of a wife, and to personal questions bearing upon the subject of matrimony had always returned evasive answers. Though he had never questioned the correctness of the lawyer's opinion in regard to his slave marriage, his conscience had never been entirely at ease since his departure from the South, and any positive denial of his married condition would have stuck in his throat. The inference naturally drawn from his reticence in regard to the past, coupled with his expressed intention of settling permanently in Groveland, was that he belonged in the ranks of the unmarried, and was therefore legitimate game for any widow or old maid who could bring him down. As such game is bagged easiest at short range, he received numerous invitations to tea-parties, where he feasted on unlimited chicken and pound cake. He used to compare these viands with the plain fare often served by aunt Milly, and the result of the comparison was another item to the credit of the North upon his mental ledger. Several of the colored ladies who smiled upon him were blessed with good looks, and uncle Wellington, naturally of a susceptible temperament, as people of lively imagination are apt to be, would probably have fallen a victim to the charms of some woman of his own race, had it not been for a strong counter-attraction in the person of Mrs. Flannigan. The attentions of the lately discharged coachman had lighted anew the smouldering fires of her widowed heart, and awakened longings which still remained unsatisfied. She was thirty-five years old, and felt the need of some one else to love. She was not a woman of lofty ideals; with her a man was a man----

"For a' that an' a' that;"

and, aside from the accident of color, uncle Wellington was as personable a man as any of her acquaintance. Some people might have objected to his complexion; but then, Mrs. Flannigan argued, he was at least half white; and, this being the case, there was no good reason why he should be regarded as black.

Uncle Wellington was not slow to perceive Mrs. Flannigan's charms of

person, and appreciated to the full the skill that prepared the choice tidbits reserved for his plate at dinner. The prospect of securing a white wife had been one of the principal inducements offered by a life at the North; but the awe of white people in which he had been reared was still too strong to permit his taking any active steps toward the object of his secret desire, had not the lady herself come to his assistance with a little of the native coquetry of her race.

"Ah, Misther Braboy," she said one evening when they sat at the supper table alone,--it was the second girl's afternoon off, and she had not come home to supper,--"it must be an awful lonesome life ye 've been afther l'adin', as a single man, wid no one to cook fer ye, or look afther ye."

"It are a kind er lonesome life, Mis' Flannigan, an' dat 's a fac'. But sence I had de privilege er eatin' yo' cookin' an' 'joyin' yo' society, I ain' felt a bit lonesome."

"Yer flatthrin' me, Misther Braboy. An' even if ye mane it"----

"I means eve'y word of it, Mis' Flannigan."

"An' even if ye mane it, Misther Braboy, the time is liable to come when things 'll be different; for service is uncertain, Misther Braboy. An' then you 'll wish you had some nice, clean woman, 'at knowed how to cook an' wash an' iron, ter look afther ye, an' make yer life comfortable."

Uncle Wellington sighed, and looked at her languishingly.

"It 'u'd all be well ernuff, Mis' Flannigan, ef I had n' met you; but I don' know whar I 's ter fin' a colored lady w'at 'll begin ter suit me after habbin' libbed in de same house wid you."

"Colored lady, indade! Why, Misther Braboy, ye don't nade ter demane yerself by marryin' a colored lady--not but they 're as good as anybody else, so long as they behave themselves. There 's many a white woman 'u'd be glad ter git as fine a lookin' man as ye are."

"Now _you 're_ flattrin' _me_, Mis' Flannigan," said Wellington. But he felt a sudden and substantial increase in courage when she had spoken, and it was with astonishing ease that he found himself saying:----

"Dey ain' but one lady, Mis' Flannigan, dat could injuce me ter want ter change de lonesomeness er my singleness fer de 'sponsibilities er matermony, an' I 'm feared she 'd say no ef I 'd ax her."

"Ye 'd better ax her, Misther Braboy, an' not be wastin' time a-wond'rin'. Do I know the lady?"

"You knows 'er better 'n anybody else, Mis' Flannigan. _You_ is de only lady I 'd be satisfied ter marry after knowin' you. Ef you casts me off I 'll spen' de rest er my days in lonesomeness an' mis'ry."

Mrs. Flannigan affected much surprise and embarrassment at this bold declaration.

"Oh, Misther Braboy," she said, covering him with a coy glance, "an' it 's rale 'shamed I am to hev b'en talkin' ter ye ez I hev. It looks as though I 'd b'en doin' the coortin'. I did n't drame that I 'd b'en able ter draw yer affections to mesilf."

"I 's loved you ever sence I fell in yo' lap on de street car de fus' day I wuz in Groveland," he said, as he moved his chair up closer to hers.

One evening in the following week they went out after supper to the residence of Rev. Cæsar Williams, pastor of the colored Baptist church, and, after the usual preliminaries, were pronounced man and wife.

III

According to all his preconceived notions, this marriage ought to have been the acme of uncle Wellington's felicity. But he soon found that it was not without its drawbacks. On the following morning Mr. Todd was informed of the marriage. He had no special objection to it, or interest in it, except that he was opposed on principle to having husband and wife in his employment at the same time. As a consequence, Mrs. Braboy, whose place could be more easily filled than that of her husband, received notice that her services would not be required after the end of the month. Her husband was retained in his place as coachman.

Upon the loss of her situation Mrs. Braboy decided to exercise the married woman's prerogative of letting her husband support her. She rented the upper floor of a small house in an Irish neighborhood. The newly wedded pair furnished their rooms on the installment plan and began housekeeping.

There was one little circumstance, however, that interfered slightly with their enjoyment of that perfect freedom from care which ought to characterize a honeymoon. The people who owned the house and occupied the lower floor had rented the upper part to Mrs. Braboy in person, it never occurring to them that her husband could be other than a white man. When it became known that he was colored, the landlord, Mr. Dennis O'Flaherty, felt that he had been imposed upon, and, at the end of the first month, served notice upon his tenants to leave the premises. When Mrs. Braboy, with characteristic impetuosity, inquired the meaning of this proceeding, she was informed by Mr. O'Flaherty that he did not care to live in the same house "wid naygurs." Mrs. Braboy resented the epithet with more warmth than dignity, and for a brief space of time the air was green with choice specimens of brogue, the altercation barely ceasing before it had reached the point of blows.

It was quite clear that the Braboys could not longer live comfortably in Mr. O'Flaherty's house, and they soon vacated the premises, first letting the rent get a couple of weeks in arrears as a punishment to the too fastidious landlord. They moved to a small house on Hackman Street, a favorite locality with colored people.

For a while, affairs ran smoothly in the new home. The colored people seemed, at first, well enough disposed toward Mrs. Braboy, and she made quite a large acquaintance among them. It was difficult, however, for Mrs. Braboy to divest herself of the consciousness that she was white, and therefore superior to her neighbors. Occasional words and acts by which she manifested this feeling were noticed and resented by her keen-eyed and sensitive colored neighbors. The result was a slight coolness between them. That her few white neighbors did not visit her, she naturally and no doubt correctly imputed to disapproval of her matrimonial relations.

Under these circumstances, Mrs. Braboy was left a good deal to her own company. Owing to lack of opportunity in early life, she was not a woman of many resources, either mental or moral. It is therefore not strange that, in order to relieve her loneliness, she should occasionally have recourse to a glass of beer, and, as the habit grew upon her, to still stronger stimulants. Uncle Wellington himself was no tee-totaler, and did not interpose any objection so long as she kept her potations within reasonable limits, and was apparently none the worse for them; indeed, he sometimes joined her in a glass. On one of these occasions he drank a little too much, and, while driving the ladies of Mr. Todd's family to the opera, ran against a lamp-post and overturned the carriage, to the serious discomposure of the ladies' nerves, and at the cost of his situation.

A coachman discharged under such circumstances is not in the best position for procuring employment at his calling, and uncle Wellington, under the pressure of need, was obliged to seek some other means of livelihood. At the suggestion of his friend Mr. Johnson, he bought a whitewash brush, a peck of lime, a couple of pails, and a hand-cart, and began work as a whitewasher. His first efforts were very crude, and for a while he lost a customer in every person he worked for. He nevertheless managed to pick up a living during the spring and summer months, and to support his wife and himself in comparative comfort.

The approach of winter put an end to the whitewashing season, and left uncle Wellington dependent for support upon occasional jobs of unskilled labor. The income derived from these was very uncertain, and Mrs. Braboy was at length driven, by stress of circumstances, to the washtub, that last refuge of honest, able-bodied poverty, in all countries where the use of clothing is conventional.

The last state of uncle Wellington was now worse than the first. Under the soft firmness of aunt Milly's rule, he had not been required to do a great deal of work, prompt and cheerful obedience being chiefly what was expected of him. But matters were very different here. He had not only to bring in the coal and water, but to rub the clothes and turn the wringer, and to humiliate himself before the public by emptying the tubs and hanging out the wash in full view of the neighbors; and he had to deliver the clothes when laundered.

At times Wellington found himself wondering if his second marriage had been a wise one. Other circumstances combined to change in some degree his once rose-colored conception of life at the North. He had believed

that all men were equal in this favored locality, but he discovered more degrees of inequality than he had ever perceived at the South. A colored man might be as good as a white man in theory, but neither of them was of any special consequence without money, or talent, or position. Uncle Wellington found a great many privileges open to him at the North, but he had not been educated to the point where he could appreciate them or take advantage of them; and the enjoyment of many of them was expensive, and, for that reason alone, as far beyond his reach as they had ever been. When he once began to admit even the possibility of a mistake on his part, these considerations presented themselves to his mind with increasing force. On occasions when Mrs. Braboy would require of him some unusual physical exertion, or when too frequent applications to the bottle had loosened her tongue, uncle Wellington's mind would revert, with a remorseful twinge of conscience, to the _dolce far niente_ of his Southern home; a film would come over his eyes and brain, and, instead of the red-faced Irishwoman opposite him, he could see the black but comely disk of aunt Milly's countenance bending over the washtub; the elegant brogue of Mrs. Braboy would deliquesce into the soft dialect of North Carolina; and he would only be aroused from this blissful reverie by a wet shirt or a handful of suds thrown into his face, with which gentle reminder his wife would recall his attention to the duties of the moment.

There came a time, one day in spring, when there was no longer any question about it: uncle Wellington was desperately homesick.

Liberty, equality, privileges,--all were but as dust in the balance when weighed against his longing for old scenes and faces. It was the natural reaction in the mind of a middle-aged man who had tried to force the current of a sluggish existence into a new and radically different channel. An active, industrious man, making the change in early life, while there was time to spare for the waste of adaptation, might have found in the new place more favorable conditions than in the old. In Wellington age and temperament combined to prevent the success of the experiment; the spirit of enterprise and ambition into which he had been temporarily galvanized could no longer prevail against the inertia of old habits of life and thought.

One day when he had been sent to deliver clothes he performed his errand quickly, and boarding a passing street car, paid one of his very few five-cent pieces to ride down to the office of the Hon. Mr. Brown, the colored lawyer whom he had visited when he first came to the city, and who was well known to him by sight and reputation.

"Mr. Brown," he said, "I ain' gitt'n' 'long very well wid my ole 'oman."

"What 's the trouble?" asked the lawyer, with business-like curtness, for he did not scent much of a fee.

"Well, de main trouble is she doan treat me right. An' den she gits drunk, an' wuss'n dat, she lays vi'lent han's on me. I kyars de marks er dat 'oman on my face now."

He showed the lawyer a long scratch on the neck.

"Why don't you defend yourself?"

"You don' know Mis' Braboy, suh; you don' know dat 'oman," he replied, with a shake of the head. "Some er dese yer w'ite women is monst'us strong in de wris'."

"Well, Mr. Braboy, it 's what you might have expected when you turned your back on your own people and married a white woman. You were n't content with being a slave to the white folks once, but you must try it again. Some people never know when they 've got enough. I don't see that there 's any help for you; unless," he added suggestively, "you had a good deal of money."

'"Pears ter me I heared somebody say sence I be'n up heah, dat it wuz 'gin de law fer w'ite folks an' colored folks ter marry."

"That was once the law, though it has always been a dead letter in Groveland. In fact, it was the law when you got married, and until I introduced a bill in the legislature last fall to repeal it. But even that law did n't hit cases like yours. It was unlawful to make such a marriage, but it was a good marriage when once made."

"I don' jes' git dat th'oo my head," said Wellington, scratching that member as though to make a hole for the idea to enter.

"It 's quite plain, Mr. Braboy. It 's unlawful to kill a man, but when he 's killed he 's just as dead as though the law permitted it. I 'm afraid you have n't much of a case, but if you 'll go to work and get twenty-five dollars together, I 'll see what I can do for you. We may be able to pull a case through on the ground of extreme cruelty. I might even start the case if you brought in ten dollars."

Wellington went away sorrowfully. The laws of Ohio were very little more satisfactory than those of North Carolina. And as for the ten dollars,--the lawyer might as well have told him to bring in the moon, or a deed for the Public Square. He felt very, very low as he hurried back home to supper, which he would have to go without if he were not on hand at the usual supper-time.

But just when his spirits were lowest, and his outlook for the future most hopeless, a measure of relief was at hand. He noticed, when he reached home, that Mrs. Braboy was a little preoccupied, and did not abuse him as vigorously as he expected after so long an absence. He also perceived the smell of strange tobacco in the house, of a better grade than he could afford to use. He thought perhaps some one had come in to see about the washing; but he was too glad of a respite from Mrs. Braboy's rhetoric to imperil it by indiscreet questions.

Next morning she gave him fifty cents.

"Braboy," she said, "ye 've be'n helpin' me nicely wid the washin', an' I 'm going ter give ye a holiday. Ye can take yer hook an' line an' go fishin' on the breakwater. I 'll fix ye a lunch, an' ye need n't come back till night. An' there 's half a dollar; ye can buy yerself a pipe er terbacky. But be careful an' don't waste it," she added, for fear she

was overdoing the thing.

Uncle Wellington was overjoyed at this change of front on the part of Mrs. Braboy; if she would make it permanent he did not see why they might not live together very comfortably.

The day passed pleasantly down on the breakwater. The weather was agreeable, and the fish bit freely. Towards evening Wellington started home with a bunch of fish that no angler need have been ashamed of. He looked forward to a good warm supper; for even if something should have happened during the day to alter his wife's mood for the worse, any ordinary variation would be more than balanced by the substantial addition of food to their larder. His mouth watered at the thought of the finny beauties sputtering in the frying-pan.

He noted, as he approached the house, that there was no smoke coming from the chimney. This only disturbed him in connection with the matter of supper. When he entered the gate he observed further that the window-shades had been taken down.

"'Spec' de ole 'oman's been house-cleanin'," he said to himself. "I wonder she did n' make me stay an' he'p 'er."

He went round to the rear of the house and tried the kitchen door. It was locked. This was somewhat of a surprise, and disturbed still further his expectations in regard to supper. When he had found the key and opened the door, the gravity of his next discovery drove away for the time being all thoughts of eating.

The kitchen was empty. Stove, table, chairs, wash-tubs, pots and pans, had vanished as if into thin air.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake!" he murmured in open-mouthed astonishment.

He passed into the other room,--they had only two,--which had served as bedroom and sitting-room. It was as bare as the first, except that in the middle of the floor were piled uncle Wellington's clothes. It was not a large pile, and on the top of it lay a folded piece of yellow wrapping-paper.

Wellington stood for a moment as if petrified. Then he rubbed his eyes and looked around him.

"W'at do dis mean?" he said. "Is I er-dreamin', er does I see w'at I 'pears ter see?" He glanced down at the bunch of fish which he still held. "Heah 's de fish; heah 's de house; heah I is; but whar 's de ole 'oman, an' whar 's de fu'niture? _I_ can't figure out w'at dis yer all means."

He picked up the piece of paper and unfolded it. It was written on one side. Here was the obvious solution of the mystery,--that is, it would have been obvious if he could have read it; but he could not, and so his fancy continued to play upon the subject. Perhaps the house had been robbed, or the furniture taken back by the seller, for it had not been entirely paid for.

Finally he went across the street and called to a boy in a neighbor's yard.

"Does you read writin', Johnnie?"

"Yes, sir, I 'm in the seventh grade."

"Read dis yer paper fuh me."

The youngster took the note, and with much labor read the following:----

"Mr. Braboy:

"In lavin' ye so suddint I have ter say that my first husban' has turned up unixpected, having been saved onbeknownst ter me from a wathry grave an' all the money wasted I spint fer masses fer ter rist his sole an' I wish I had it back I feel it my dooty ter go an' live wid 'im again. I take the furnacher because I bought it yer close is yors I leave them and wishin' yer the best of luck I remane oncet yer wife but now agin

"Mrs. Katie Flannigan.

"N.B. I 'm lavin town terday so it won't be no use lookin' fer me."

On inquiry uncle Wellington learned from the boy that shortly after his departure in the morning a white man had appeared on the scene, followed a little later by a moving-van, into which the furniture had been loaded and carried away. Mrs. Braboy, clad in her best clothes, had locked the door, and gone away with the strange white man.

The news was soon noised about the street. Wellington swapped his fish for supper and a bed at a neighbor's, and during the evening learned from several sources that the strange white man had been at his house the afternoon of the day before. His neighbors intimated that they thought Mrs. Braboy's departure a good riddance of bad rubbish, and Wellington did not dispute the proposition.

Thus ended the second chapter of Wellington's matrimonial experiences. His wife's departure had been the one thing needful to convince him, beyond a doubt, that he had been a great fool. Remorse and homesickness forced him to the further conclusion that he had been knave as well as fool, and had treated aunt Milly shamefully. He was not altogether a bad old man, though very weak and erring, and his better nature now gained the ascendency. Of course his disappointment had a great deal to do with his remorse; most people do not perceive the hideousness of sin until they begin to reap its consequences. Instead of the beautiful Northern life he had dreamed of, he found himself stranded, penniless, in a strange land, among people whose sympathy he had forfeited, with no one to lean upon, and no refuge from the storms of life. His outlook was very dark, and there sprang up within him a wild longing to get back to North Carolina,--back to the little whitewashed cabin, shaded with china and mulberry trees; back to the wood-pile and the garden; back to the old cronies with whom he had swapped lies and tobacco for so many years.

He longed to kiss the rod of aunt Milly's domination. He had purchased his liberty at too great a price.

The next day he disappeared from Groveland. He had announced his departure only to Mr. Johnson, who sent his love to his relations in Patesville.

It would be painful to record in detail the return journey of uncle Wellington--Mr. Braboy no longer--to his native town; how many weary miles he walked; how many times he risked his life on railroad tracks and between freight cars; how he depended for sustenance on the grudging hand of back-door charity. Nor would it be profitable or delicate to mention any slight deviations from the path of rectitude, as judged by conventional standards, to which he may occasionally have been driven by a too insistent hunger; or to refer in the remotest degree to a compulsory sojourn of thirty days in a city where he had no references, and could show no visible means of support. True charity will let these purely personal matters remain locked in the bosom of him who suffered them.

IV

Just fifteen months after the date when uncle Wellington had left North Carolina, a weather-beaten figure entered the town of Patesville after nightfall, following the railroad track from the north. Few would have recognized in the hungry-looking old brown tramp, clad in dusty rags and limping along with bare feet, the trim-looking middle-aged mulatto who so few months before had taken the train from Patesville for the distant North; so, if he had but known it, there was no necessity for him to avoid the main streets and sneak around by unfrequented paths to reach the old place on the other side of the town. He encountered nobody that he knew, and soon the familiar shape of the little cabin rose before him. It stood distinctly outlined against the sky, and the light streaming from the half-opened shutters showed it to be occupied. As he drew nearer, every familiar detail of the place appealed to his memory and to his affections, and his heart went out to the old home and the old wife. As he came nearer still, the odor of fried chicken floated out upon the air and set his mouth to watering, and awakened unspeakable longings in his half-starved stomach.

At this moment, however, a fearful thought struck him; suppose the old woman had taken legal advice and married again during his absence? Turn about would have been only fair play. He opened the gate softly, and with his heart in his mouth approached the window on tiptoe and looked in.

A cheerful fire was blazing on the hearth, in front of which sat the familiar form of aunt Milly--and another, at the sight of whom uncle Wellington's heart sank within him. He knew the other person very well; he had sat there more than once before uncle Wellington went away. It was the minister of the church to which his wife belonged. The preacher's former visits, however, had signified nothing more than

pastoral courtesy, or appreciation of good eating. His presence now was of serious portent; for Wellington recalled, with acute alarm, that the elder's wife had died only a few weeks before his own departure for the North. What was the occasion of his presence this evening? Was it merely a pastoral call? or was he courting? or had aunt Milly taken legal advice and married the elder?

Wellington remembered a crack in the wall, at the back of the house, through which he could see and hear, and quietly stationed himself there.

"Dat chicken smells mighty good, Sis' Milly," the elder was saying; "I can't fer de life er me see why dat low-down husban' er yo'n could ever run away f'm a cook like you. It 's one er de beatenis' things I ever heared. How he could lib wid you an' not 'preciate you _I_ can't understan', no indeed I can't."

Aunt Milly sighed. "De trouble wid Wellin'ton wuz," she replied, "dat he did n' know when he wuz well off. He wuz alluz wishin' fer change, er studyin' 'bout somethin' new."

"Ez fer me," responded the elder earnestly, "I likes things what has be'n prove' an' tried an' has stood de tes', an' I can't 'magine how anybody could spec' ter fin' a better housekeeper er cook dan you is, Sis' Milly. I 'm a gittin' mighty lonesome sence my wife died. De Good Book say it is not good fer man ter lib alone, en it 'pears ter me dat you an' me mought git erlong tergether monst'us well."

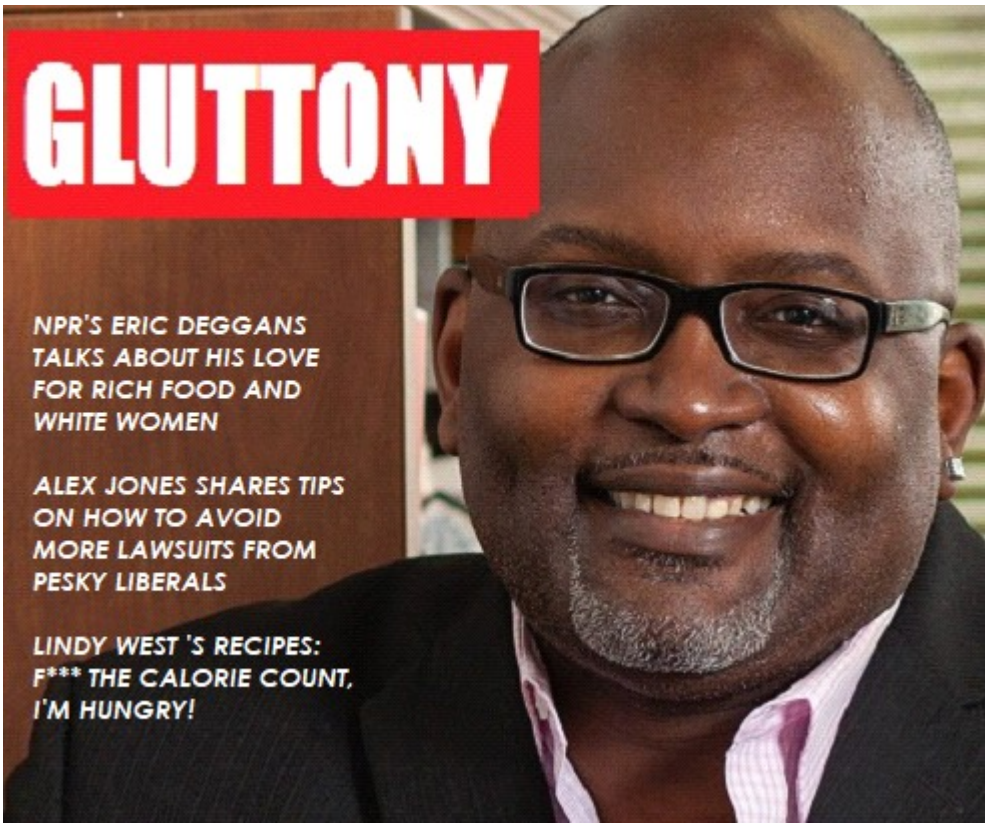
Wellington's heart stood still, while he listened with strained attention. Aunt Milly sighed.

"I ain't denyin', elder, but what I 've be'n kinder lonesome myse'f fer quite a w'ile, an' I doan doubt dat w'at de Good Book say 'plies ter women as well as ter men."

"You kin be sho' it do," averred the elder, with professional authoritativeness; "yas 'm, you kin be cert'n sho'."

"But, of co'se," aunt Milly went on, "havin' los' my ole man de way I did, it has tuk me some time fer ter git my feelin's straighten' out like dey oughter be."

"I kin 'magine yo' feelin's, Sis' Milly," chimed in the elder sympathetically, "w'en you come home dat night an' foun' yo' chist broke open, an' yo' money gone dat you had wukked an' slaved full f'm mawnin' 'tel night, year in an' year out, an' w'en you foun' dat no-'count nigger gone wid his clo's an' you lef' all alone in de worl' ter scuffle 'long by yo'self."


GLUTTONY
NPR'S ERIC DEGGANS TALKS ABOUT HIS LOVE FOR RICH FOOD AND WHITE WOMEN
ALEX JONES SHARES TIPS ON HOW TO AVOID MORE LAWSUITS FROM PESKY LIBERALS
LINDY WEST 'S RECIPES: F*** THE CALORIE COUNT, I'M HUNGRY!

"Yas, elder," responded aunt Milly, "I wa'n't used right. An' den w'en I heared 'bout his goin' ter de lawyer ter fin' out 'bout a defoce, an' w'en I heared w'at de lawyer said 'bout my not bein' his wife 'less he wanted me, it made me so mad, I made up my min' dat ef he ever put his foot on my do'sill ag'in, I 'd shet de do' in his face an' tell 'im ter go back whar he come f'm."

To Wellington, on the outside, the cabin had never seemed so comfortable, aunt Milly never so desirable, chicken never so appetizing, as at this moment when they seemed slipping away from his grasp forever.

"Yo' feelin's does you credit, Sis' Milly," said the elder, taking her hand, which for a moment she did not withdraw. "An' de way fer you ter close yo' do' tightes' ag'inst 'im is ter take me in his place. He ain' got no claim on you no mo'. He tuk his ch'ice 'cordin' ter w'at de lawyer tol' 'im, an' 'termine' dat he wa'n't yo' husban'. Ef he wa'n't yo' husban', he had no right ter take yo' money, an' ef he comes back here ag'in you kin hab 'im tuck up an' sent ter de penitenchy fer stealin' it."

Uncle Wellington's knees, already weak from fasting, trembled violently beneath him. The worst that he had feared was now likely to happen. His only hope of safety lay in flight, and yet the scene within so fascinated him that he could not move a step.

"It 'u'd serve him right," exclaimed aunt Milly indignantly, "ef he wuz sent ter de penitenchy fer life! Dey ain't nuthin' too mean ter be done

ter 'im. What did I ever do dat he should use me like he did?"

The recital of her wrongs had wrought upon aunt Milly's feelings so that her voice broke, and she wiped her eyes with her apron.

The elder looked serenely confident, and moved his chair nearer hers in order the better to play the role of comforter. Wellington, on the outside, felt so mean that the darkness of the night was scarcely sufficient to hide him; it would be no more than right if the earth were to open and swallow him up.

"An' yet aftuh all, elder," said Milly with a sob, "though I knows you is a better man, an' would treat me right, I wuz so use' ter dat ole nigger, an' libbed wid 'im so long, dat ef he 'd open dat do' dis minute an' walk in, I 'm feared I 'd be foolish ernuff an' weak ernuff to forgive 'im an' take 'im back ag'in."

With a bound, uncle Wellington was away from the crack in the wall. As he ran round the house he passed the wood-pile and snatched up an armful of pieces. A moment later he threw open the door.

"Ole 'oman," he exclaimed, "here 's dat wood you tol' me ter fetch in! Why, elder," he said to the preacher, who had started from his seat with surprise, "w'at's yo' hurry? Won't you stay an' hab some supper wid us?"

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THE CUSTOMS LOUNGE

BY E. A. PROULX

Anything can happen in the customs lounge--since they let those Earth people in!

[Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenberg etext was produced from *Worlds of If Science Fiction, September 1963*. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

There were usually a few Customs Inspectors in the lounge, waiting to begin their shifts, hanging around trading news and incidents and drinking the bad, lukewarm kasser that was a standing joke in the Immigration-Customs Service.

Old Grag was telling for perhaps the eightieth time of a success of his when he was young in the Service.

"... They had this small box of sticky, squashy sweets with them. The young one was eating one. Many another Inspector would have passed them through, but I thought the young one chewed too much and too loud. So I

said, 'Mind if I have one?'

"'Wah!' says they together, 'it would set you on edge, Noble Wise Inspector. It is the taste of another world.' They was Venusers, and they started shifting and hopping around, and humming their national anthem, _you_ know how they used to do back in the old days. I made quite a nice little find. Almost a half-scree of chamfer in each one of those sweets. I got a promotion out of that, and the Venusers got a six-year close out."

Inspector Flimp blew one of his noses loudly.

"Hee, that's nothing. _I_ recall back when we first opened up for Immigration, and a whole shipload of earthers came in. They were crammed in like tigs in a nest, and as usual they didn't know one word of the language, they didn't have any idea of where to go or how to do anything, and they'd got separated from their controller. They just stood around, huddled together and jabbering at each other. Well, I checked out about twenty of them, and then there comes up this big ugly female. Well, I jacks the elevator up some more, and I looks down at her.

"'Name!', I call. 'Gladdis Cracklegill,' or some other weird earth name she screams at me. 'Too much name,' I say. 'You've got enough name there for five of you. Which will you choose, Glad, Is, Crack, El or Gil?'

"Well, it took me a while to make her understand me--my earth accent wasn't too good then, and she was slow-headed, having only one, like all earthers. But I finally made her understand what I wanted to know, and then, by Clag, what a ramping frowst she did make!

"It was while she was screeching at me that I noticed her teeth were pretty big, even for such a huge beast as she was. So I secretly turned on the Dento-Spyer, right into her jaws, and what a sight on the view screen! Each of those big teeth was false and filled to the top with Earth seeds she was trying to smuggle!"

"Earthers!" exploded young Nask. "They make me sick!"

"I'm with you, Nask," said Inspector Sprim. "And I don't understand why they _still_ keep routing earthers through Immigration anyway. They claim they're a borderline case, but when you've seen as many as I have, you know, which side of the border they're on."

* * * * *

Nask went off to the kasser dispenser and his place was taken by Brif, the head Inspector, who had been listening.

"Un-edge yourself, Sprim," smiled Brif, contracting one of his heads. "I have good news, rare news and fine news. The Four Council decision just came down to us. Earthers are now to be routed through Livestock instead of Immigration beginning very soon."

A cheer went up from the little group of Customs and Immigration officials. The one Livestock Inspector in the lounge groaned in despair.

Old Inspector Flimp seemed bothered.

"They've made themselves a mistake," he sputtered. "Earthers can be clever and tricky even after they're altered. Why, I seen them pull every trick in the book coming through here. Did I ever tell you about the stunted one with an artificial head who tried to pass himself off as a rest-park planner? Well, it seems that...."

Two young, but large inspectors sneaked away from the group when they saw old Flimp was launched into one of his dull yarns again.

Outside the lounge, after a quick look up and down the hall, they ducked into the robot-cleaner storage closet.

"Boy," gasped the shorter inspector. "I _had_ to get out of there. Besides the torture of listening to that two-headed monster babble on and on about how he outwitted earthers when he was still able to move around, this miserable thing has started to come loose again."

He gave an impatient wrench to his left head, and it wobbled enough to expose some of the delicate wires that the earth robotic engineer had labored over so many hours.

The other began tightening straps and buckles for him.

"There," he said finally. "You look like one of the boys again."

Laughing together, the earthers went back into the Customs Lounge.

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One of many fine discontinued pop albums found in Archive's Unlocked Records collection, Mavis Rivers' *Swing Along With Mavis* is worth a listen. Released in the early sixties, it features upbeat arrangements on Great American Songbook classics and then-newer favs. Perfect for summer listening by the pool or sweet memories in the coming nuclear winter, if you can find a place to hide it from Project 2025 droogs. Stand out tracks: *Love And The Weather*, and *There, I've Said It Again*.

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